VOLUME II

Administrative
Review

Elections SK

October 6, 2025

The Honourable Todd Goudy
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Room 129, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK S4S 0B3

Mr. Speaker:

Pursuant to Section 286 of *The Election Act, 1996*, I am honoured to submit Administrative Review, Volume II in *A Report on the Thirtieth General Election*.

This volume provides an administrative review of the election, including results of field study analysis of the delivery of the 30th General Election along with measurements of stakeholder perceptions. Data was collected impartially and independently through a combination of poll observations, surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Respectfully submitted,
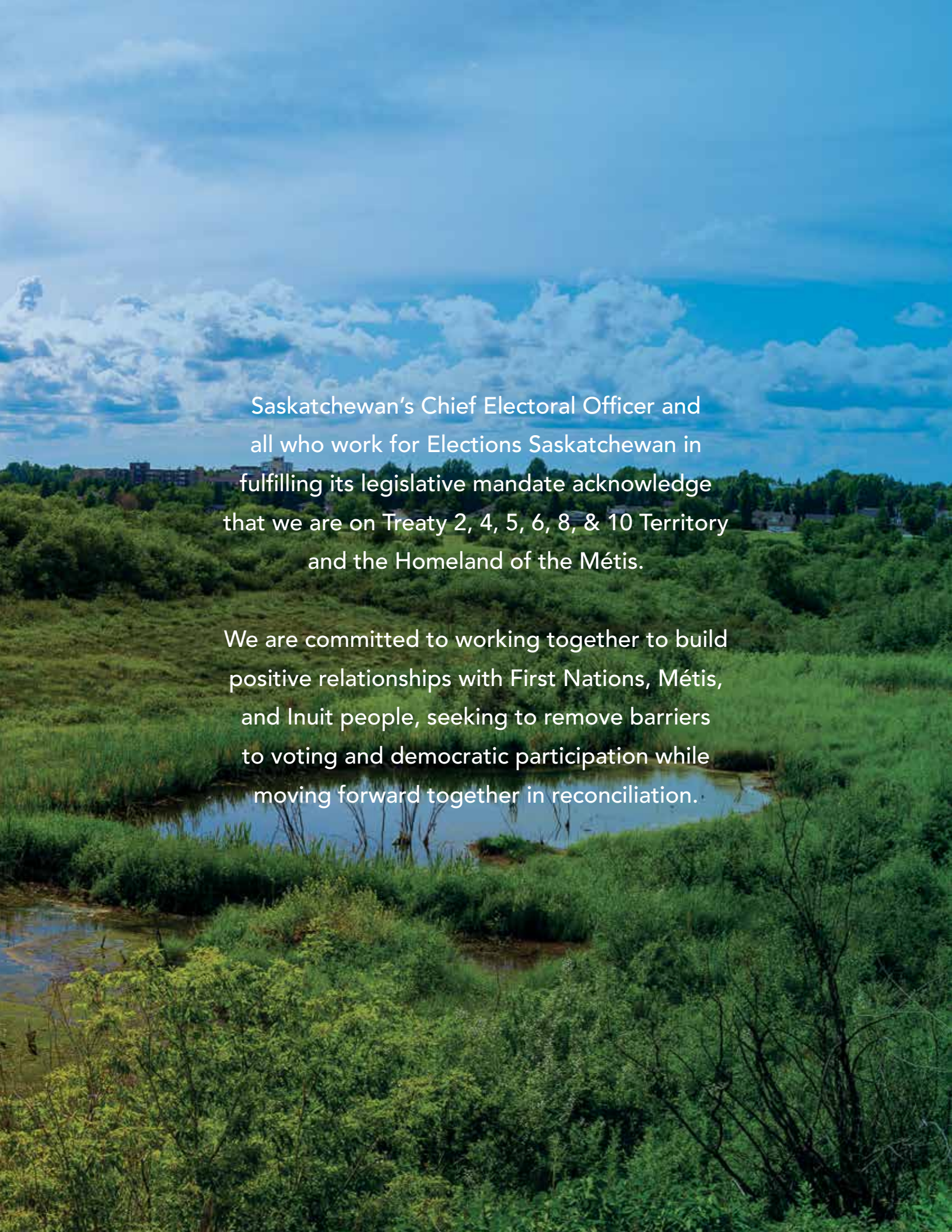
Michael Boda, D.Phil., Ph.D.
Chief Electoral Officer
Province of Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan's Chief Electoral Officer and all who work for Elections Saskatchewan in fulfilling its legislative mandate acknowledge that we are on Treaty 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, & 10 Territory and the Homeland of the Métis.

We are committed to working together to build positive relationships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, seeking to remove barriers to voting and democratic participation while moving forward together in reconciliation.

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Reporting on the General Election: Four Volumes

For more than 100 years, Saskatchewan's provincial elections remained essentially unchanged. From the province's first election in December 1905 until its 29th General Election in October 2020, voters had a brief opportunity each election to exercise their democratic rights at a single, assigned location. Stacks of paper, unpredictable wait times, and thousands of pencils were the hallmarks of the voting experience. Due to the system's limitations, voter convenience was not, and could not be, a priority. That changed in 2024.

Saskatchewan's 30th General Election, held on October 28, featured several improvements designed to make voting easier, quicker, and more accessible. Successful implementation of these changes led to an election marked by the broadest voter access in Saskatchewan's history, all while safeguarding and strengthening the integrity of the province's democratic system.

Elections Saskatchewan began laying the groundwork for the province's 30th General Election shortly after the completion of the 29th General Election in October 2020. Its 2023–2025 strategic plan, *Service. Integrity. Innovation. Expanding Electoral Excellence in Saskatchewan*, outlined a focused and deliberate strategy to honour and uphold stakeholder confidence while improving voting methods.[1] Collaborative leadership and a strong focus on best practices were central to the plan.

**Elections Saskatchewan's
2023–2025 Vision**
We are a collaborative leader in establishing and refining best practices in election management in Canada.

Strategic Imperative
Saskatchewan's 30th General Election is modernized and positively perceived by stakeholders.

The updated strategic plan also underscored Elections Saskatchewan's five core values:

- Integrity
- Impartiality
- Dedication
- Innovation
- Service

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[1] Elections Saskatchewan. *Service. Integrity. Innovation. Expanding Electoral Excellence in Saskatchewan: A Strategic Plan for Elections Saskatchewan, 2023-2025* (Regina: Elections Saskatchewan, April 2023) ("Expanding Electoral Excellence"). Elections Saskatchewan's past and present strategic plans are available online at https://www.elections.sk.ca/reports-data/strategic-planning/.

Expanding Electoral Excellence came to fruition in the 30th General Election, in which Elections Saskatchewan successfully improved service to voters while maintaining the integrity of its voting system. For the first time, Saskatchewan's provincial election featured a "Voting Week" of six full days of voting, resulting in 56 hours of in-person voting spread over six days: the longest voting window in the history of the province. Those who could not vote in person had improved opportunities to vote by mail, and homebound voting was made available to those who could not leave their house due to a disability.

Elections Saskatchewan was also able to broaden access through the careful deployment of modernized elements, such as the use of electronic poll books in more than half of provincial constituencies. The team carefully considered the realities of election administration in Saskatchewan to improve service throughout all regions of the province: for example, constituencies without the infrastructure to support electronic poll books were served with redesigned forms that eliminated significant amounts of repetition and handwriting. The result was an exceptionally organized and well-run election.

The story of Saskatchewan's 30th General Election will be told over the course of four volumes, each providing different insight into the successes and challenges involved in planning for, organizing, and implementing one of the largest events in the history of the province. Together, these four volumes will constitute **A Report on the Thirtieth General Election**:

- **Volume I – Statement of Votes** (published May 2025) provided data surrounding public participation in the 2024 electoral event. It collated information to provide a richer understanding of voting trends in the province. Volume I included information on candidates, registered political parties, historical data, and voting station by station results.

- **Volume II – An Administrative Review** (current volume) offers a detailed look at how the 30th General Election was conducted. The volume looks at two sides of the electoral event. First, it focuses on how the electoral event was conducted based on in-person observations of voting throughout Voting Week and other key activities, including vote counting. Second, the volume incorporates stakeholder perceptions, drawing conclusions from surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other sources of data.

- **Volume III – Statement of Expenditures** will capture and provide context for the four-year costs of the event. Such costs are incurred years in advance of the election and continue to be accumulated well after voting ends. This volume will look at spending related to reimbursements given to eligible registered political parties and candidates (established within *The Election Act, 1996*) and will provide the total cost of administering the 30th General Election in 61 constituencies.

- **Volume IV – Chief Electoral Officer's Recommendations for Legislative Reform** will consider what has been learned over the course of the 30th electoral cycle in order to position the province—its voters, political parties, candidates, and provincial election management body—to conduct a successful 31st General Election. Volume IV will be published following a thorough review and assessment of how the 30th General Election was conducted, considering best practice and changes in electoral administration across the country. This volume will offer the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendations on legislative amendments to continue broadening access to voting while serving stakeholders more effectively.

While the publication of this four-volume report will fulfil the Chief Electoral Officer's statutory duty outlined in *The Election Act 1996*, its intent goes well beyond. It will offer detailed information on election participation, finances, and conduct. It will put forward an in-depth review and assessment of Elections Saskatchewan's administration of the election before, during, and after voting took place. Finally, it will offer legislators a roadmap to continue broadening voter access and making Saskatchewan's election system work for all.

By shining a light on all aspects of the election system, Elections Saskatchewan seeks to equip legislators, registered political parties, and other key stakeholders to strengthen the democratic system that will serve the province for decades to come.

Michael D. Boda, D. Phil., Ph.D.
Chief Electoral Officer
Province of Saskatchewan

October

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		22	23	24	25	26
27	28					

← Voting Week →

The 30th General Election featured Saskatchewan's first transition from separate Election Day and advance voting periods to a unified Voting Week.

CHAPTER TWO

Election Overview

This chapter provides an overview of Saskatchewan's 30th General Election. It covers events leading up to the election, including Elections Saskatchewan's efforts to broaden access to voting.

The Election Overview also includes details on the call of the election, voter registration activities, and key dates in the election calendar. It provides summary information on registered political parties and candidates and the various ways voters could cast their ballots.

This chapter also provides general information regarding the administrative review of the 30th General Election. A general summary of social scientific methods is provided as well as a breakdown of the research instruments used. Further information can be found in Appendix A of this Volume.

Background

Saskatchewan's 30th General Election was held throughout October 2024, with Voting Week running from October 22 through 28.

The election was held in 61 constituencies throughout the province, each electing a member to the Legislative Assembly through a first-past-the-post (or single member plurality) electoral system. At the time of the election, the estimated population of Saskatchewan was 1,250,761 and Elections Saskatchewan, working with Statistics Canada, estimated that there were 829,884 eligible voters in the province.

Broadening Access

Saskatchewan's 30th General Election featured several improvements designed to make voting easier, quicker, and more accessible, with the goal of reducing barriers to participation and broadening voter access. This was accomplished through the continued modernization of the province's system for administering voting, a multi-phase, multi-election plan that has been underway for nearly 10 years.[1]

Election administration can often be restricted by overly prescriptive legislation, and Saskatchewan is no exception. *The Election Act, 1996* (the Act) provides detailed instructions on how voting should be conducted in this province. However, the Act also provides the ability for the Chief Electoral Officer to put forward alternate procedures, equipment, and technology that vary from those legislated instructions. These modifications are made through "CEO Directives," which must be approved by the Board of Internal Economy to be implemented during a general election.[2] Directives provide a valuable

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[1] The Chief Electoral Officer first introduced a three-phase plan for modernizing Saskatchewan's system for conducting elections in Volume IV of *A Report on the Twenty-Eighth General Election: Chief Electoral Officer's Recommendations for Legislative Reform* (Regina: Elections Saskatchewan, April 2018). Full reports on all elections from 2007 onward are available on Elections Saskatchewan's website at https://www.elections.sk.ca/reports-data/reports-publications/.

[2] See *The Election Act, 1996*, sections 5.2 through 5.6.

opportunity for Elections Saskatchewan to test new procedures, equipment, and technology within strictly controlled parameters, offering valuable information on the viability of a chosen approach. Once a modification has proven effective during a general election, the Chief Electoral Officer can better consider whether it should be included as a legislative change recommendation. Legislators, in turn, have data and information on how a proposed change will impact voters, candidates, and other stakeholders.

Following a series of communications between the Chief Electoral Officer and the Board of Internal Economy, five CEO Directives were approved on December 5, 2023, for implementation during the 30th General Election. These directives were designed to broaden access to the ballot, reduce the number of election workers needed, and improve the administration of the election, as follows:

- Polling Divisions (CEO Directive 2023-009): Directed changes to the traditional use of geographic sub-regions and allowed larger numbers of voters to be assigned to specific areas and voting stations than the 300-person limit outlined in the Act.

- Polling Period (CEO Directive 2023-010): Authorized a transition away from distinct advance and Election Day voting periods toward a unified, six-day "Voting Week".

- Electronic Poll Books/Voting Record (CEO Directive 2023-011): Introduced technology to make it faster and easier to process an increased number of voters while enabling real time data sharing with political stakeholders. Also implemented the "voting record" form and modified the traditional duties of the poll clerk. Electronic poll books were used in 34 of the province's 61 constituencies, consisting of the cities of Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, Yorkton, and Swift Current, and the constituencies of the Battlefords and Martensville-Blairmore.

- Vote by Mail (CEO Directive 2023-014): Continued use of the centralized Vote by Mail process developed for Saskatchewan's 29th General Election, held on October 26, 2020, and used in subsequent by-elections. Also introduced the "Second Preliminary Count," held two days after the last day of voting.

- HRT Counting (CEO Directive 2023-018): Amended vote counting procedures to allow for a central count of hospital, remand, and temporarily displaced voter ballots alongside remaining Vote by Mail ballots that were counted at the Final Count.

The impact of these changes on voting and vote counting will be described throughout this chapter. The Chief Electoral Officer will recommend further changes for legislators to consider in advance of the province's next election in Volume IV of this Report.

Constituency Boundaries

The provincial constituency boundaries in place for Saskatchewan's 30th General Election were enacted with the dissolution of the 29th Legislative Assembly in accordance with *The Representation Act, 2022*. These boundaries were established based on the recommendations of the Saskatchewan Boundaries Commission, 2022, as established under *The Constituency Boundaries Act, 1993*. There are 61 provincial constituencies.

Maps for individual constituencies are included with constituency results in Chapter 9 of Volume I of this Report. Additional maps, including a provincial map and composite maps of urban areas, are available in Chapter 13 of Volume I.

In Saskatchewan, constituency boundaries are reviewed and adjusted every 10 years based on the census population of the province. The next provincial boundary commission is scheduled to form early in 2032.

Voter Registration

Saskatchewan's 30th General Election was the province's third general election with a Permanent Register of Voters (PRV) in place. The PRV was created using data collected in advance of and during the province's 28th General Election, held in 2016. Prior to that, a door-to-door enumeration was necessary before every election. The PRV is updated regularly via data exchange agreements with Elections Canada and eHealth.

While the PRV is maintained primarily through these regular updates, Elections Saskatchewan also undertook proactive voter registration activities throughout the election cycle. One key activity was "Voter Registration Month," which launched in May 2023 and occurred again in May 2024. During Voter Registration Month, Elections Saskatchewan promoted the

importance of voter registration through paid advertising, social media posts, and media engagement. Elections Saskatchewan also promoted voter registration through activities such as sending birthday cards to Saskatchewan residents on or around their 18th birthday, encouraging them to add their name to the province's voters list.

In advance of an election, Elections Saskatchewan sends Voter Information Cards (VICs) to all registered voters in the province. VICs include important information on where and when to vote as well as what ID is needed to cast a ballot. More than 784,000 VICs were mailed in October 2024, along with more than 14,400 by email and just over 4,870 by SMS text message.

Issuance of Writs of Election

On October 1, 2024, Saskatchewan's 29th Legislature was dissolved pursuant to section 6 of *The Legislative Assembly Act, 2007* by the Honourable Russ Mirasty, Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan. Later that day, an order was passed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council directing the Chief Electoral Officer to issue a writ of election to each of the province's 61 Returning Officers.

At dissolution, standing in the Legislative Assembly were 42 Saskatchewan Party MLAs, 14 New Democratic Party (NDP) MLAs, one Saskatchewan United Party MLA, and three independent MLAs. One constituency, Saskatoon Northwest, was vacant when the election was called.

Key Election Dates	
October 1	Writs of election issued
October 12	Nomination deadline
October 19	Last day to apply to Vote by Mail or as a homebound voter
October 22 – 26 & 28	Voting Week
October 28	Last day of voting and First Preliminary Count
October 30	Second Preliminary Count
November 9	Final Count
November 20	Return of the writs

Provincial Political Parties

Seven registered political parties fielded candidates in Saskatchewan's 30th General Election. Pursuant to section 231 of the Act, the Chief Electoral Officer recognized the following parties in the register of political parties:

- Buffalo Party of Saskatchewan
- New Democratic Party, Sask. Section
- Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan
- Saskatchewan Green Party
- Saskatchewan Party
- Saskatchewan Progress Party
- Saskatchewan United Party

Candidate Nomination

The candidate nomination period ended at 2 p.m. on Saturday, October 12. At the close of nominations, 243 candidates had been nominated.

Registered Political Party	# of Candidates
Buffalo Party	16
New Democratic Party (NDP)	61
PC Party of Saskatchewan	11
Saskatchewan Green Party	58
Saskatchewan Party	61
Saskatchewan Progress Party	3
Saskatchewan United Party	31
Independent	2
Total	243
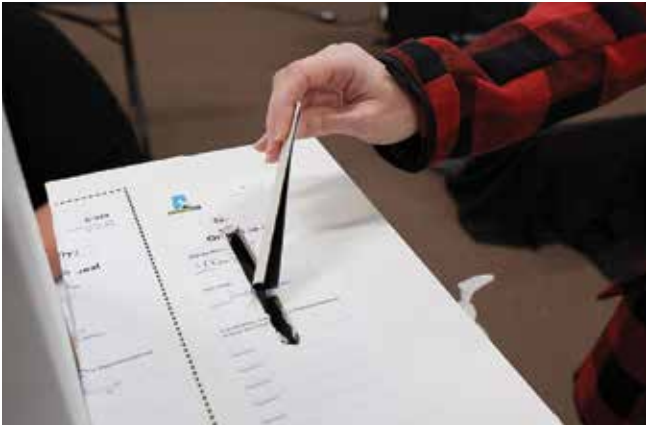
Nominated Candidates – 1982 to 2024

Year	1982	1986	1991	1995	1999	2003	2007	2011	2016	2020	2024
Candidates	250	211	207	178	206	234	239	191	268	236	243
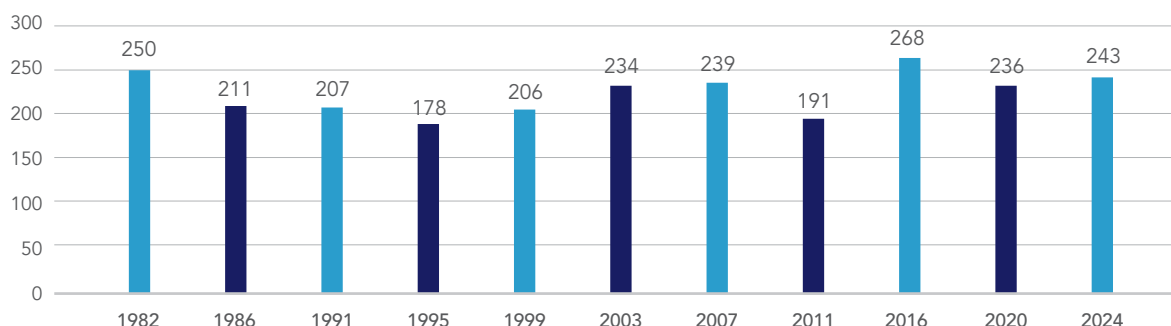
Overview of Voting in Saskatchewan's 30th General Election

This section contains information on all the voting opportunities available in Saskatchewan's 30th General Election. The key transition in the election was the movement to a Voting Week rather than separating Election Day from the advance voting period. To ensure that all voters had access to the ballot, regardless of circumstances, Voting Week was supplemented by Vote by Mail and a number of other special voting opportunities addressed in detail below.

Note that the transition to a unified Voting Week and away from a division between Election Day and advance voting periods means that data from the 30th General Election does not correspond exactly to data from previous elections. Throughout Volumes I to IV of this Report, it will be noted where this shift has impacted the ability to make meaningful comparisons between current and historical election data.

Voting Week

The 30th General Election featured Saskatchewan's first transition from separate Election Day and advance voting periods to a unified Voting Week. The change, made possible through a CEO Directive, was designed to broaden access to the ballot, place the voter at the centre of the system, and allow people to vote at a time that worked for them rather than a specific date and time set by Elections Saskatchewan. A key communications goal was to help voters understand that they could vote at any point during the week, and to encourage them to do so rather than waiting until their very last opportunity.

Voting Week began on Tuesday, October 22. From October 22 through Saturday, October 26, voting took place from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., an increase of one hour per day from the province's 2020 election and two hours per day over the 2016 election. On the last day of voting, October 28, voting stations were open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Voting paused to update voting records and lists on Sunday, October 27, ensuring readiness for the last day of voting at all locations that did not use electronic poll books.

For the first five days of Voting Week, there were 303 voting locations open to serve voters. During those five days, voters could cast their ballot at any location in their constituency. On the last day of voting, all voters were assigned to a specific location. In urban locations that used electronic poll books, the same voting locations were used for all six days of Voting Week. In rural constituencies, an additional 413 voting locations were added on the last day of voting to ensure that no voter had to travel more than 30 minutes to cast a ballot.

Vote by Mail (VBM)

Before 2020, voting by mail (also called absentee voting) was a very small component of Saskatchewan's provincial elections. During Saskatchewan's 28th General Election in 2016, for example, a total of 4,420 absentee votes were recorded (one percent of all votes cast), including both mail-in ballots and votes cast directly in the Returning Office.

In 2020, during the province's 29th General Election, the volume of voters interested in voting by mail increased greatly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. To account for

this, the Chief Electoral Officer opted to replace traditional absentee voting with a centralized and updated Vote by Mail process. An online application portal was created whereby voters could apply, upload the necessary identification documents, and complete the entire request process. In 2020, more than 56,000 voters used Vote by Mail. This constituted 12.7 percent of all votes cast in that election.

In 2024, the Chief Electoral Officer again opted for a centralized Vote by Mail process authorized by CEO Directive. Elections Saskatchewan's online Vote by Mail portal was opened for applications in early June and remained open until the application period closed on Saturday, October 19. Due to the timelines and the relatively short period available to administer the Vote by Mail process, a "write in" (or "Form B") ballot was provided as part of each Vote by Mail package. Voters could write in the name of the candidate they wished to vote for, or the name of the registered political party or leader of the party they wished to vote for.

While Vote by Mail was available to all voters, it was particularly valuable for specific groups. Seniors residing in independent living facilities were a primary audience, as these facilities frequently house individuals who might find it difficult to vote at their assigned location. To facilitate participation by this population, Elections Saskatchewan gathered data on more than 250 independent living buildings in the province, including information on the number of residents in each building and the existence of common areas where voting information could be displayed. Beginning in mid-summer, Elections Saskatchewan delivered outreach materials to each of these facilities explaining how to apply for a Vote by Mail package. Follow-up assistance was provided as needed.

In the end, 26,388 Vote by Mail votes were counted, about 5.6 percent of all votes cast. With the exception of the election held during the COVID-19 pandemic, this was significantly higher than the number or percentage of absentee (mail-in) ballots in any other election in the province's history.

Special Voting

By legislation, Special Voting refers to all voting opportunities that take place outside of traditional Election Day voting. In practice, however, Special Voting refers more specifically to voting that takes place outside of standard in-person voting and Vote by Mail. Special Voting opportunities help ensure that every voter has an opportunity to cast a ballot, regardless of circumstances. Elections Saskatchewan administers Special Voting opportunities working closely with outside agencies such as Correctional Services Canada; the Saskatchewan Health Authority; and the provincial ministries of Health, Social Services, and Corrections, Public Safety, and Policing.

During Saskatchewan's 30th General Election, Special Voting options included homebound voting, personal care facility voting, and voting in hospitals and remand centres. While legislation also provides Special Voting options for voters temporarily displaced due to fires, floods, or other emergencies, no polls were required for this purpose in 2024.

Homebound Voting

Homebound voting was introduced in 2016 in advance of Saskatchewan's 28th General Election on the recommendation of the Chief Electoral Officer. This option was available to voters who were unable to vote in person due to a medical condition or disability, or due to caring for an individual who voted by homebound voting. During that election, 574 voters cast their ballot without leaving their home. Voters were served by a team of two election officials who visited the voter at their home with a ballot and a ballot box and completed the voting process. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible for election officials to visit voters in their homes, so homebound voting was offered as a form of Vote by Mail.

In 2024, homebound voting was once again offered in its original form, along with an additional approach informally referred to as "mobile homebound voting." Mobile homebound voting was offered when a high volume of individuals residing in the same building applied for homebound voting. In these cases, Elections Saskatchewan provided both a central voting station in the building and the option of visiting voters in their individual units.

Voting in Personal Care Facilities, Hospitals, and Remand Centres

Elections Saskatchewan works closely with outside agencies to offer in-person Special Voting opportunities in personal care facilities, hospitals, and remand centres.

As defined in the Act, personal care facilities can be operated by the Saskatchewan Health Authority, licensed by the Ministry of Health, or overseen by the Ministry of Social Services. In the 30th General Election, voting was offered in 369 personal care facilities from October 22 to 26, 2024.

In-person Special Voting was available in hospitals and remand centres on the final day of voting, October 28. This option was available to eligible voters who were being held in remand or were patients in hospital on that day. These voters received the Form B write in ballot form (also used for the Vote by Mail process) so their vote could be counted in the constituency where they normally resided. Voting was offered in 68 hospitals and remand centres throughout the province.

Vote Counting

Shifts in Saskatchewan's election administration over the past two election cycles have resulted in changes to how votes are counted.

Until 2020, Saskatchewan's traditional model for counting votes saw all Election Day, advance voting, and personal care facility votes counted after voting ended on election night. The remaining absentee, hospital, remand, and temporarily displaced votes were counted at the Final Count, twelve days after Election Day. All votes were counted in the field, either in voting locations or in constituency returning offices.

In 2020, due to a significant increase in Vote by Mail (i.e., absentee) ballots, the Chief Electoral Officer opted to introduce changes to ensure greater certainty and faster results for candidates, political parties, and the general public. During that election, the vote count on Election Day was referred to as the First Preliminary Count. A new count, called the Second Preliminary Count, was held two days

> Shifts in Saskatchewan's election administration over the past two election cycles have resulted in changes to how votes are counted.

later and included most Vote by Mail ballots. This count was conducted centrally in Regina, and updated results were announced throughout the two days it took to count these ballots. The Final Count was held 12 days after Election Day, as required by legislation. During the Final Count, all the remaining Vote by Mail ballots were included, along with hospital, remand, and temporarily displaced voter ballots. With the conclusion of the Final Count, the results of the 2020 election became official.

This same model was adopted in 2024: a First Preliminary Count held immediately after voting concluded, a Second Preliminary Count two days later, and a Final Count 12 days after the election. However, changes to election administration resulted in two additional modifications to vote counting processes.
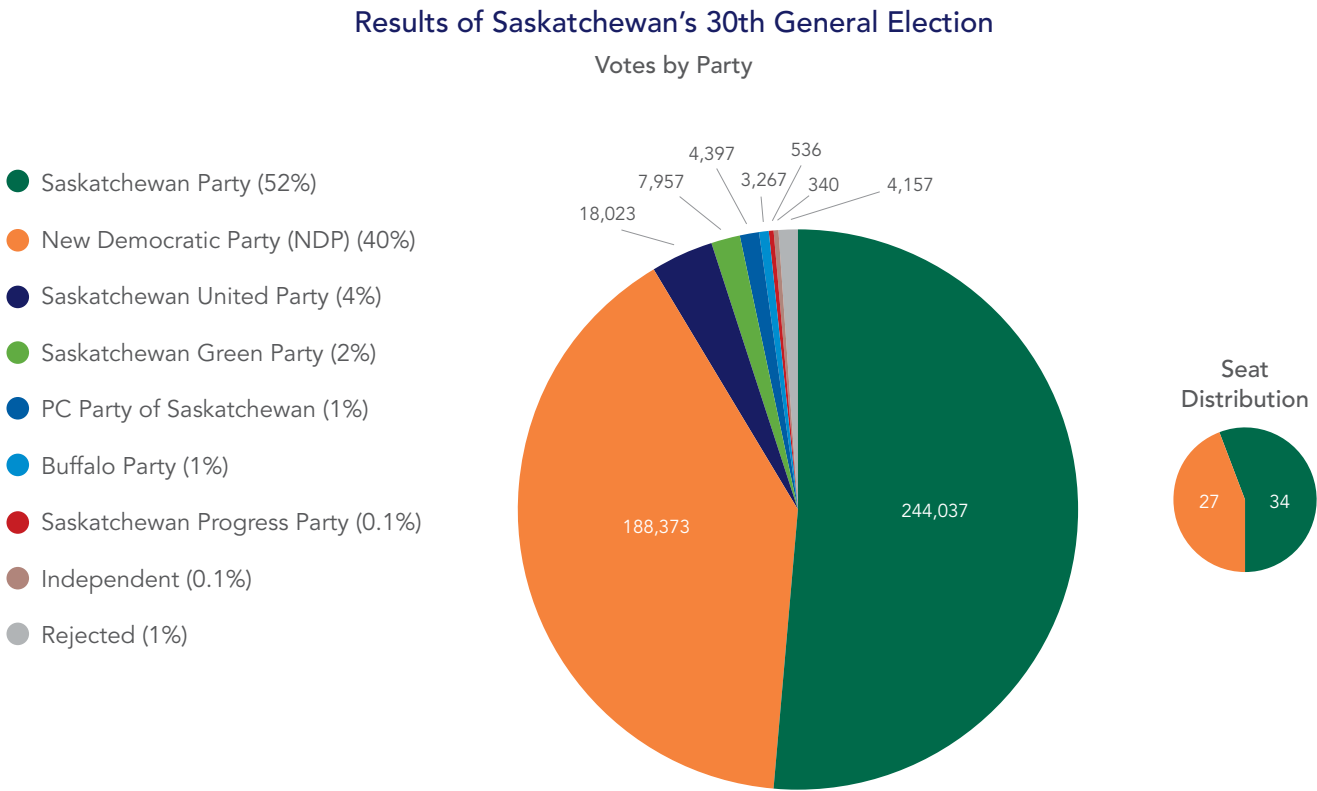
The first change to the method of vote counting in 2024 flowed out of the introduction of electronic poll books at many voting locations. The efficiencies and changes introduced through CEO Directives (such as the use of electronic poll books, the voting record, and larger polling divisions) meant that a much smaller number of election workers needed to be hired to administer voting. However, this would mean fewer workers available to count ballots once voting concluded, challenging the ability to deliver results in a timely fashion. Elections Saskatchewan addressed this by deploying additional teams of election workers whose only job was to assist with the counting of ballots. A total of 135 Count Teams were deployed to voting locations where the number of votes cast necessitated the extra assistance. More information on the use of Count Teams and their effectiveness is outlined in Chapter 4 of this Volume.

The second change to counting procedures was to include hospital, remand, and temporarily displaced votes in the central count held during the Final Count. Traditionally, the ballot boxes containing these votes had been shipped from each Returning Office to Elections Saskatchewan's head office. The ballot boxes were opened at head office, then the votes were sorted by constituency and sealed into new ballot boxes. Finally, these new boxes were shipped to the appropriate Returning Office and counted by the Returning Officer during the Final Count. During this past election, the Chief Electoral Officer issued a CEO Directive simplifying this process by permitting these votes to be counted only at the Final Count, along with the Vote by Mail ballots.

Election Results

After the Final Count, 34 Saskatchewan Party and 27 New Democratic Party (NDP) members were declared elected.

Results of Saskatchewan's 30th General Election
Votes by Party

- ● Saskatchewan Party (52%)
- ● New Democratic Party (NDP) (40%)
- ● Saskatchewan United Party (4%)
- ● Saskatchewan Green Party (2%)
- ● PC Party of Saskatchewan (1%)
- ● Buffalo Party (1%)
- ● Saskatchewan Progress Party (0.1%)
- ● Independent (0.1%)
- ● Rejected (1%)

18,023   7,957   4,397   3,267   536   340   4,157

244,037

188,373

Seat Distribution

27   34

Administrative Review

The administrative review for the 30th General Election focused on the preparation undertaken before the election (the "Pre-writ Period") and the actual conduct of the election itself (the "Election Period"). Across the province, thousands of decisions were made during the days following the 29th General Election through and beyond the last day of voting, October 28, 2024. Many of these decisions were the responsibility of the Chief Electoral Officer and his staff, but many others were delegated to a Field Leadership Team (FLT) consisting of 61 Returning Officers, 61 Election Clerks, and 10 Supervisory Returning Officers (SRO) distributed across Elections Saskatchewan's administrative regions. *The Election Act, 1996* provides the framework for these decisions, but the implementation of the Act's provisions, and the many operational and technical details involved in that implementation, are placed in the hands of administrators to manage in accordance with electoral best practice. This implementation is the primary concern of the administrative review reported in this volume.

To ensure the independence of this review, the Chief Electoral Officer engaged electoral management experts from outside of the organization to undertake the administrative review activities reported in this document.

The election itself was planned and conducted within a dynamic environment marked by the implementation of important changes designed to broaden access to voting. Some of these changes, such as the use of electronic

pollbooks, were piloted during a set of three by-elections held in August 2023. The Chief Electoral Officer then submitted a suite of CEO Directives that documented these changes under section 5 of the Act to the Board of Internal Economy of the Legislative Assembly, who approved the changes for use in the 30th Provincial Election.

The review of the election was designed by a steering committee consisting of the Chief Electoral Officer and two social scientists and experts in election administration. The steering committee's work began in early 2023, with adjustments in spring and summer of 2024.

The following activities were included in the scope of this review:

- Implementing technology in the voting place for electronic strike-off;
- The quality of voter registration and lists of voters used for administering the election;
- The recruitment and training of the election workforce across 61 constituencies;
- Securing accessible voting places throughout Saskatchewan;
- Services for voters with disabilities;
- Services for First Nation voters;
- Political party and candidate support;
- Provision of voting information for voters;
- The change from "advance voting" and "Election Day voting" to Voting Week;
- Modifications to the design of voting places;
- Administering Vote by Mail;
- Administering voting at polls; and
- Ballot counting and reporting procedures.

While evaluation of the conduct of an election begins with a consideration of whether legal requirements were met, an election management body's administrative success or failure is also a matter of stakeholder satisfaction. If the administration of the election fulfils legal requirements, but is perceived as unfair, inefficient, or haphazard, the electoral process itself could be drawn into disrepute. For that reason, this review contains both data on how the election was managed and data on public perceptions and the views of key stakeholders.

If the administration of the election fulfils legal requirements, but is perceived as unfair, inefficient, or haphazard, the electoral process itself could be drawn into disrepute.

This review does not cover topics outside the remit of the Chief Electoral Officer even if they bear on or influence the administration of the election. Topics beyond the scope of this review include legislation regarding a fixed election date, election finance rules, the single member plurality electoral system, and the number, size, and configuration of constituencies. The Chief Electoral Officer works within these rules and requirements but has no authority to change them.[3]

Data Sources and Assessment Tools

The administrative review provided in this volume relies on a variety of data sources. The surveys described below were developed by the steering committee and conducted by the Canadian Hub for Applied and Social Research (CHASR) at the University of Saskatchewan. CHASR also conducted the focus groups using questions developed by the steering committee and information on potential participants supplied by the steering committee or from CHASR sources. The review team conducted interviews with official agents and organized the on-site observation process. Focus groups were conducted within six weeks of the election; interviews were conducted over a longer period, from November 2024 to January 2025. The following data sources constitute the foundation for this volume[4]:

- **Administrative Data.** These are data collected during the administration of the election from the early stages through the post-election period. They apply to all matters in which simple counts are possible—e.g., registrations, polling stations, ballots, turnout—and data or information privy to officials in the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer. All administrative data in this volume have been gathered by the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer at the request of the steering committee.

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[3] It should be noted that data is currently being gathered on administration of the province's political finance regime. The administrative review of that area of the Chief Electoral Officer's responsibilities will be presented in the forthcoming Volume III of this report.

[4] For more detailed information, see Appendix A of this volume.

- **On Site Observers.** With the assistance of the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, the review team recruited 12 University of Regina students and arranged for them to observe the voting process in 12 constituencies in or near Regina (six from within the boundaries of Regina, and six in the surrounding rural areas). Within these constituencies, the observers visited 27 voting locations on October 26 during the final day of early voting and an additional 29 locations on October 28, the last day of voting. A debrief with all observers was conducted on October 29.

- **Vote by Mail Observation.** Elections Saskatchewan expected and experienced an unprecedented increase in the number of mail-in ballots for the 29th General Election and consequently administered Vote by Mail through head office. During the 30th General Election, Elections Saskatchewan retained these centralized processes for Vote by Mail. These ballots were collected, adjudicated, and counted at head office. Those that arrived by 8 p.m. on the last day of voting were counted during the Second Preliminary Count (October 30), which was observed by the review team. Ballots postmarked by October 28 that arrived after the close of polls on October 28 but before end of day on November 7 were counted on November 9.

- **Voter/Non-voter Survey.** Immediately following the election on October 28, 2024, the Canadian Hub for Applied and Social Research (CHASR) conducted a non-random sample online survey of voters and non-voters in Saskatchewan to assess various aspects of their voting experience. The weighted sample of respondents included 1,716 voters and 366 non-voters.

- **Field Research Team Survey.** The Field Leadership Team (FLT) survey was an online survey administered to all Supervisory Returning Officers, Returning Officers, and Election Clerks. The survey launched on November 12, 2024, and closed on November 30, 2024.

[T]his review contains both data on how the election was managed and data on public perceptions and the views of key stakeholders.

- **Election Workers Survey.** The Election Week Workers (EWWs) survey was an online survey administered to all those who worked at early polls or at polls on the last day of voting. The survey was programmed on the Voxco online survey platform and took approximately 15 minutes to complete. It launched on October 30, 2024, and closed on November 14, 2024.

- **Field Leadership Focus Group.** Focus groups were conducted in early December, with 13 participants taking part. The focus groups took approximately 90 minutes. Participants responded to questions related to their roles and responsibilities, recruitment and training, voting procedures, the use of technology, vote counting, accessibility, First Nations, voting modernization, the Saskatchewan Election Management System (SEMS), and their training experience.

- **Accessibility Community Focus Group.** Prior to the Pre-Writ Period, the Chief Electoral Officer engaged the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) to conduct consultations with accessibility groups within the province. After the election, the teams returned to conduct follow up sessions. Additionally, one focus group was conducted by CHASR on behalf of the administrative review team with voters who identified as having a disability when completing the survey of voters and non-voters, and with representatives of a variety of groups dedicated to advancing the interests of those with visual, hearing, mobility, and other challenges. Nine participants took part, and the session lasted approximately 90 minutes. Participants discussed issues including their views about the provincial election, information about the election, voter registration, access to voting, outreach from Elections Saskatchewan, the experience of specific disability communities, and the use of technology.

- **Youth Focus Group.** Young electors (aged 18–24 years) who completed the voter and non-voter survey were asked whether they would participate in a focus group of young electors following the election, and six indicated that they would. CHASR arranged a time for the focus group to take place; unfortunately, only two participants attended the session. Nonetheless, a focus group was conducted with these respondents in late November, in which they were questioned about such things as their views about provincial elections, information about the election, voter registration, outreach by Elections Saskatchewan, provincial elections and youth organizations, and their voting experience.

- **Interviews With Party Officials.** Interviews were conducted with Chief Official Agents from the Green Party of Saskatchewan, the New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan, the Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan Party. In addition, an interview was conducted with the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Saskatchewan.

An Antiquated Approach to Delivering Elections

As the following chapters will show, the administration of Saskatchewan's 30th General Election was an administrative success from the viewpoint of the province's election stakeholders.

There were significant changes in the 30th General Election, including the use of technology such as laptop computers (also called electronic poll books or e-poll books) for voter strike-off in urban voting places, streamlining staffing in those voting places, important changes to voting locations throughout the voting period, and significant increases in early voting and use of Vote by Mail. In spite of these major shifts, the election results were widely accepted without controversy or dispute. While voter turnout remains a concern in Saskatchewan – only 58.1 percent of registered voters and 56.8 percent of eligible voters participated (up from 53.8 percent and 52.9 percent, respectively, in 2020) – this is a broader issue that all of Saskatchewan must face, not only those tasked with election administration.

The administrative reviews of the 28th and 29th General Elections discussed at length the challenges and limitations associated with Saskatchewan's antiquated method of conducting a general election. That traditional model includes two voting officials assigned to every ballot box, using a paper-based system to record voters in poll books, and scrambling to relay this information to head office so people voting in advance polls can be struck off the voters lists used throughout the constituency. Under this model, election workers are required to work very long hours and are responsible for understanding and administering multiple tasks.

Elections Saskatchewan's report on the 28th General Election in 2016 included a number of recommendations for changing and modernizing voting and election

administration procedures. Some of these were implemented for the 29th General Election in 2020, but many had to be postponed due to the challenges of conducting an election during a global pandemic.

Nevertheless, the portrait that emerged from the reviews of elections in 2016 and 2020 made a compelling case for modernization. Consequently, Elections Saskatchewan endeavoured to implement significant changes for the 2024 election. Some of those changes were implemented by the Chief Electoral Officer on his authority, while others required authorization from the Legislative Assembly. In the end, this resulted in partial implementation of the recommended changes, as the Legislative Assembly approved only some of the changes recommended by the Chief Electoral Officer.

The data reviewed in this volume reinforces and deepens the case for modernization identified in Elections Saskatchewan's previous reports on the 28th and 29th General Elections, demonstrating an even more compelling need for continued change. The specific administrative changes required will be described more fully in the recommendations section contained in this volume, while larger issues of legislative change will be addressed in Volume IV of this report, *Chief Electoral Officer's Recommendations for Legislative Reform*. That volume will put forward a proposal for shifts to the legal framework surrounding election rules, in the interest of further broadening access for Saskatchewan's voters in 2028 and beyond.

Contents of This Volume

As the enumeration of data sources indicates, this administrative review has produced a great deal of information, not all of which could be included in this volume. Care has been taken to convey the key findings in each section, beginning with the Pre-Writ Period in **Chapter 3** and proceeding to the election period in **Chapter 4**.

Chapter 3 begins with a discussion of pre-election communications by Elections Saskatchewan, followed by a discussion of voter registration, voting locations, and special sections on accessibility and Indigenous electors.

Chapter 4 covers the perspectives of the political parties and candidates, the provision of information to voters, the various methods of voting, and vote counting and reporting.

Elections Saskatchewan's planned response to the various assessment findings is detailed in **Chapter 5**. This includes clarifying the distinction between what can be changed administratively and what must first be changed legislatively. A full listing of the commitments for improvements in election administration is found in this chapter as well.

Appendix A provides a detailed description of the various assessment methods undertaken during the 30th General Election that contributed to this volume. Finally, a list of the people and organizations that contributed to this volume is found in the Acknowledgements section.

SUMMARY OF COMMITMENTS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

In response to this assessment, the Chief Electoral Officer has committed Elections Saskatchewan to a number of administrative changes and improvements in advance of the next general election. For a complete list of administrative commitments and more detail on the items shown below, see Chapter 5 of this volume.

Election Timing

- Continue to examine the impact of the proximity of provincial and local election periods.
- Build capacity amongst the Field Leadership Team.
- Establish clear target dates for the adoption of election modernization initiatives.

Communicating with Voters and Other Stakeholders

- Continue to build relationships with media outlets and political parties.
- Continue to monitor ever-changing threats to the election environment.
- Work to create plain language informational materials that serve all voters.
- Position Elections Saskatchewan as the authoritative source of provincial election administration information.
- Continue to develop the database on political financing so that it is easy for voters to obtain accurate, timely, and comprehensive information.

Seniors Voting

- Undertake a comprehensive assessment of voting services for senior citizens and produce a strategy for seniors voting in the 31st General Election.

Special Voting

- Assess all Special Voting provisions as part of the administrative review for the 31st General Election.

Voter Registration

- Engage with data-sharing partners to ensure register is as current and comprehensive as possible.

- Continue to engage with vendors to ensure the voters list, or voting record, uses enhanced content.
- Continue to work to ensure voter register coverage and currency for traditionally underserved communities.
- Expand the use of electronic Voter Information Cards.
- Plan for the potential future availability of electronic forms of ID.
- Continue the use of scanning technology and expand where administratively viable.

Voting Locations and Returning Office Space

- Assess the number of polling locations in constituencies that used technology and adjust planning for the 31st General Election accordingly.
- Consider the possibility of multiple returning offices overseen by a single Returning Officer.
- In continuing evolution toward Voting Week, work toward making voting more seamless.

Election Workers

- Assess the workload of poll workers and review the compensation model for each position.
- Continue to prioritize adult education principles in training.
- Develop an enhanced testing program for all training modules and applications.

Accessibility for Voters with Disabilities

- Expand relationship with key organizations that support the disability community in identifying needs and in partnering to find innovative solutions.

- Highlight voting by mail and special balloting as options available for some members of the disability community.
- Develop and implement a recruitment and training strategy for people with disabilities.

First Nations and Métis Voters

- Review the experiences with the broader engagement with First Nations communities from the 2024 election and build upon successes.
- Use memoranda of understanding as a way of developing and formalizing partnership opportunities with leaders in First Nations communities.
- Develop and implement a recruitment and training strategy for First Nations electors.
- Examine the Supervisory Returning Officer for First Nations position used in 2024 and build upon its successes.
- Apply lessons from greater engagement of First Nations communities to an engagement strategy for First Nations voters not living on reserve.
- Continue engagement with Métis electors and produce voter information material in the Michif language.
- Consider mobile early polls for First Nation communities that may require less than a full five days of early voting.
- Ensure contact with First Nations band offices in the year prior to an election.

Political Parties and Candidates

- Consult with registered political parties that do not currently access data to determine what steps can be taken to better facilitate access.

Early Voting

- Expand on foundations laid for Voting Week during the 2024 General Election.
- Expand the use of technology for electronic strike-off.
- Continue to develop a database of locations that are available for early voting and meet all accessibility standards.

Vote by Mail

- Ensure that registered political parties are invited to observe all administrative aspects of voting by mail.
- Develop methods whereby voters with disabilities can request and obtain a package to vote by mail that meets their disability needs.

Last Day of Voting

- Remove any administrative obstacles to the continued implementation of Voting Week polls.

Ballot Counting and Reporting

- Explore innovative approaches to provide "just in time" refresher to training.
- Review system for deployment of Count Teams to ensure efficiency and integrity.
- Continue to conduct research on ballot counting technology within legislative parameters.
- Encourage parties and candidates to deploy candidate representatives to observe vote counting procedures at all polling places.
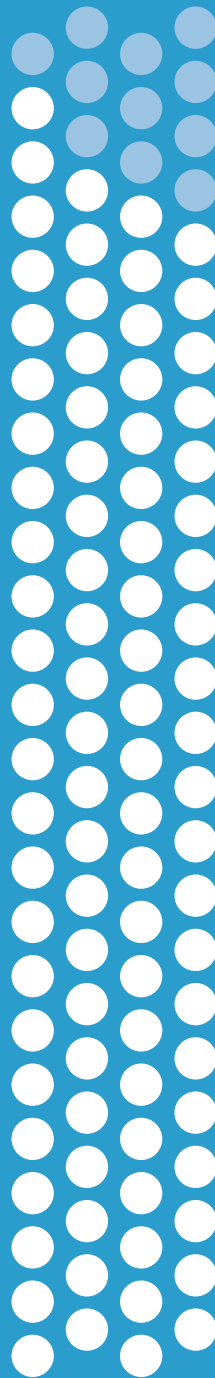
93%

93 percent of respondents said it was easy to get information on when to vote
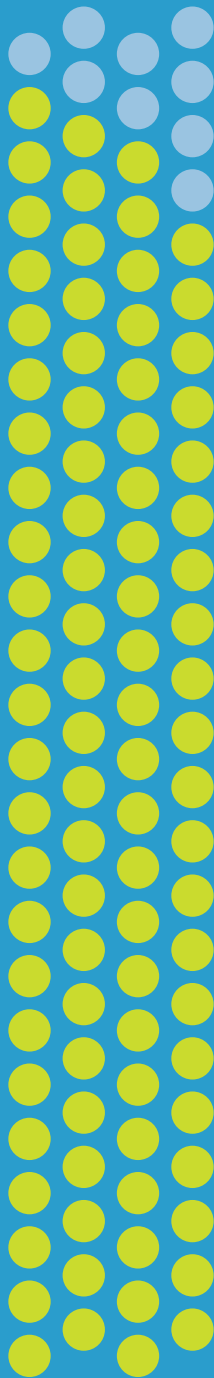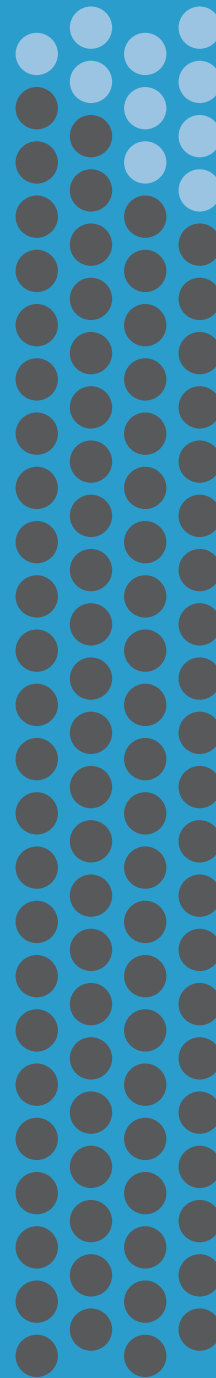
91%

91 percent said it was easy to get information on where to vote

89%

89 percent said it was easy to get information on different ways to vote

90%

90 percent agreed it was easy to get information on the voter ID required to vote

3

The Pre-Writ Period

The Timing of the Election

In Saskatchewan, provincial general elections are typically held every four years on a schedule established by provincial legislation. So-called "fixed date" elections were introduced in the province in 2008. Since that time, the government has consistently followed the dates set by the legislation. Writs for Saskatchewan's 30th General Election were accordingly issued on October 1, 2024, for a polling day on Monday, October 28, as directed by legislation.[1]

The 30th General Election, held in October 2024, saw a change in the terminology used to describe the election date and the voting period. *The Election Act, 1996* (the Act) refers to the last date on which votes are cast as either Election Day or Polling Day, and states that there must be five days of advance voting that must conclude no more than seven days and no less than one day before Election Day. In 2024, Elections Saskatchewan sought to do away with the distinction between voting on Election Day and in an advance poll. Messaging to voters, parties, candidates, and other electoral stakeholders replaced the language of Election Day and advance voting with a unified Voting Week that included five days of early voting along with a sixth and last day of voting. To further reinforce this message, voting places that used technology for voter strike-off ("technology constituencies") used the same location for all six days of voting. In the remaining – primarily rural – areas that were not equipped with new technology ("non-technology constituencies"), it was necessary to provide a larger number of voting places on the last day of Voting Week to lessen the distance many voters needed to travel to vote.

Communicating with Electors

Elections Saskatchewan communicates with electors to enhance public knowledge and understanding of the electoral process. Communications frequently support education and awareness by focusing on key dates in the election calendar and informing voters of actions they can take to simplify the voting experience, such as updating their voter registration information or applying for a Vote by Mail package. Other key topics include when, where, and how to vote, information on changes to voting procedures, and targeted messages reminding specific groups of their right to vote, such as voters with disabilities, newly enfranchised voters (such as those turning 18 or new Canadians), or First Nations electors.

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[1] Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan, Bill 33: *The Legislative Assembly (Election Dates) Amendment Act, 2019.*

An important feature of Elections Saskatchewan's 2024 communication strategy was the publication of op-eds by the Chief Electoral Officer in several media outlets.[2] The CEO also conducted five technical briefings with the media at key stages of the election to ensure that members of the media understood the changes being implemented in the 2024 election. Elections Saskatchewan also ran four public advertising campaigns to support the 2024 election, consisting of paid advertising supplemented by a strategy of earned media.

Advertising for the 30th General Election began on May 1, 2024, the province's second annual Voter Registration Month. Voter Registration Month messaging was intended to raise awareness that an election was scheduled for late October and to encourage voters to proactively ensure that their voter registration information was up to date. Additionally, to foster voter registration awareness, Elections Saskatchewan sent birthday cards to young people during the month of their 18th birthday, advising them that they were eligible to vote and encouraging them to add their name to the voters list.

A second communications campaign focused on building awareness of Vote by Mail opportunities, including the need to apply for a Vote by Mail package to use this voting option. Communication on this topic ran in three phases. The first phase, from June 10 to July 7, focused on encouraging voters to apply right away for a mail-in ballot. The second phase, from August 12 to September 22, provided a reminder to apply for Vote by Mail. And the third phase, from October 2 to 13, delivered a reminder of the October 19 application deadline.

A third communications campaign focused on the recruitment of election workers. The task of recruitment was made easier in 2024 by changes in voting procedures, especially in technology constituencies. It was anticipated that across the province, Elections Saskatchewan would need only about 4,500 election workers for the 30th General Election, a sharp decline from the approximately 11,000 workers required in 2016 and again in 2020.

For the past two election cycles, Elections Saskatchewan has maintained the Take Part community, a virtual community of potential workers that it informs of election-related news and potential employment. The Take Part community represents a key resource of over 10,000 members that can be drawn upon to fill the staffing requirements of election events in the province. In 2024, Elections Saskatchewan ran a series of recruitment advertising campaigns to supplement the stock of potential election workers, tapping into the pool of talent beyond existing members of the Take Part community.

The recruitment advertising campaign included three phases. Phase one, from July 2 to 16, focused on staffing the returning offices. Phase two, from August 12 to 25, focused on Voting Week workers. Phase three consisted of supplemental advertising to recruit workers outside of the two major centres of Regina and Saskatoon, as more election workers were required in rural constituencies.

Elections Saskatchewan's fourth and final pre-election communications campaign was designed to support general awareness of the election, providing information on when, where, and how to vote. This campaign ran from October 2 to 28. In addition to this public communication, Elections Saskatchewan also communicated directly with voters by a Voter Information Card to each registered voter and an information bulletin, called a "Voter Information Letter," to each residential address housing a registered voter.
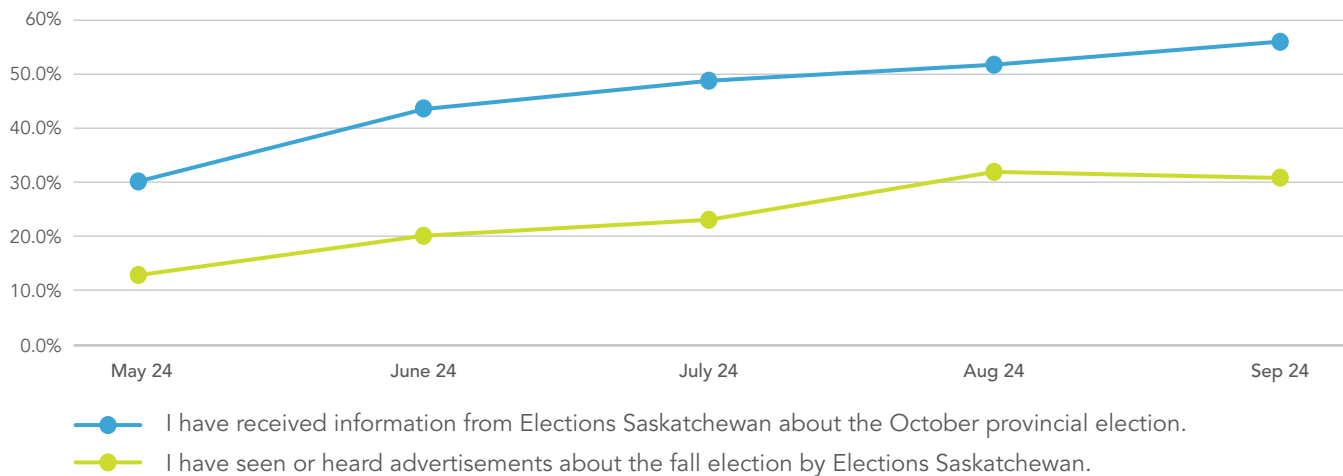
Taken together, these four campaigns were intended to increase awareness of the upcoming election, provide voters with the information necessary to vote, help in the recruitment of temporary election workers, and inform voters about what to expect in the voting place.

Findings
Elections Saskatchewan conducted a series of tracking polls from May through September to gauge its advertising's reach and effectiveness in increasing awareness of the election in the Pre-Writ Period. In a series of five monthly surveys from May through September, eligible voters were asked whether they had received information about the election from Elections Saskatchewan, and whether they had heard or seen ads by Elections Saskatchewan about the fall election.

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[2] See, for example: "First Saskatchewan Voting Week Coming for October Election." *Leader-Post/Star Phoenix*, June 19, 2024. "Sask Votes 2024: A Different Voting Experience." *SaskToday*, September 14,2025. "SaskVotes 2024: Working Collaboratively to Build Relationship and Trust." *Eagle Feather News*, October 7, 2024.

Elections Saskatchewan Communications Campaign

Legend:
- I have received information from Elections Saskatchewan about the October provincial election.
- I have seen or heard advertisements about the fall election by Elections Saskatchewan.

There was a consistent increase in affirmative responses to both questions through the Pre-Writ Period, indicating an increase in the public's receipt of information and exposure to Elections Saskatchewan's advertising. This corresponded to increasing awareness of the election, from 71 percent in May to 85 percent in August and September. While a number of factors may account for this increase, Elections Saskatchewan's awareness-raising efforts are among them.

In addition to data on the growing awareness of the upcoming election from pre-election surveys, Elections Saskatchewan also conducted a survey of electors in the period immediately following the election. These data reveal that most voters found it easy to obtain information on the election, which in turn increased their knowledge about the election.

For example, 93 percent of respondents said it was easy to get information on when to vote, 91 percent said it was easy to get information on where to vote, 89 percent said it was easy to get information on different ways to vote, and 90 percent agreed it was easy to get information on the voter ID required to vote. Similarly high percentages of respondents said they were very or somewhat knowledgeable about the dates for voting (91 percent), where to vote (90 percent), different ways to vote (87 percent), and the ID needed to vote (88 percent).

Although there was a consistently high knowledge level on these matters related to voting, knowledge was less

widespread on some less common voting options. For example, although knowledge was very high on the procedures for voting on the last day of voting (90 percent) and on early voting (86 percent), there was a significant drop in the percentage who said they were knowledgeable about the procedures for voting by mail (73 percent) or other voting options, such as homebound voting or voting in mobile polls (60 percent). This is likely because fewer voters actively consider using these voting options, resulting in fewer voters seeking to inform themselves about these options and access the information readily available from Elections Saskatchewan.

While Elections Saskatchewan communicated with electors in a variety of ways, the survey data reveal that voters relied on some information sources more than others. Generally speaking, the types of information provided by Elections Saskatchewan can be sorted into four tiers according to their impact on voters. The first tier – the most effective information source and communication tool – was the Voter Information Card (VIC), cited by 62 percent of respondents as a source of election information. The second tier included the Voter Information Letter sent to households (48 percent) and the Elections Saskatchewan website (41 percent). The effectiveness of the Voter Information Letter, which provided information on how to apply for a Vote by Mail package, was also evidenced by a significant increase in Vote by Mail applications in the five days after the letter went out. The third tier of sources included various forms of advertising, such as social media and online ads (24 percent), newspaper

ads (23 percent), and radio ads (21 percent). While relevant, those sources were not as influential as tiers 1 and 2. Finally, the fourth tier consisted of sources cited by fewer than one in 10 respondents, including out-of-home ads such as billboards (cited by eight percent) and the Elections Saskatchewan 1-800 number (eight percent).

Rates of satisfaction with these various advertising sources tend to roughly correspond to the tier in which they fall. For example, 94 percent of respondents said they were satisfied with the VIC, similar to the 95 percent satisfied with the letter to households and 93 percent satisfied with the Elections Saskatchewan website. Levels of satisfaction with the information provided by various ads, while high, were slightly lower at 89 percent for each of social media, newspaper, and radio ads. Satisfaction with out-of-home advertising and the 1-800 number were 80 percent and 82 percent, respectively.

In addition to the high levels of satisfaction with individual communication elements, there also was a high satisfaction overall with communications by Elections Saskatchewan during the election. Eighty-six percent of respondents said Elections Saskatchewan ads were informative, 88 percent said the ads were fair and unbiased, and 87 percent said Elections Saskatchewan provided the right amount of information. Furthermore, 90 percent said Elections Saskatchewan used effective methods of communication, and 93 percent said the advertising was effective in informing them on when, where, and how to vote. In addition, voters appear to understand and support the provision of additional information to groups of voters who have lower than average levels of engagement in elections. Two-thirds of respondents (68 percent) agreed that Elections Saskatchewan should provide additional information to groups such as First Nations, new Canadians, and younger voters.
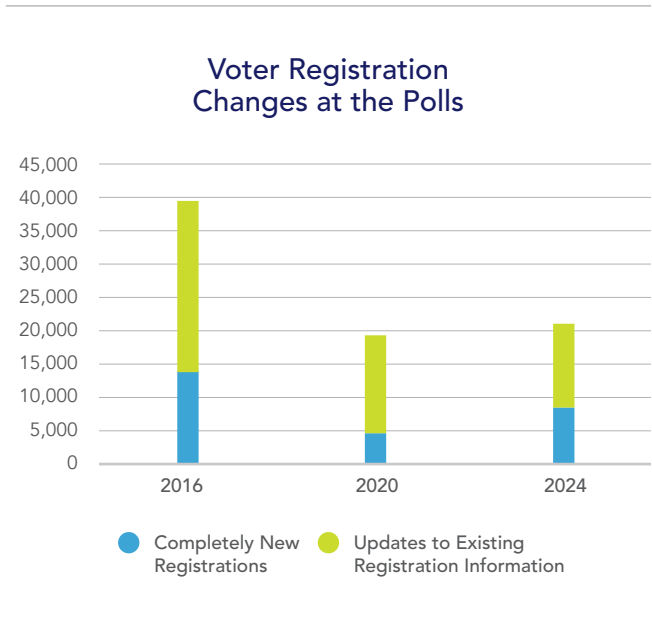
Voter Registration

Voter registration is the term used to describe the process whereby an election management body confirms that a person has met the eligibility requirements for voting, and places that person on the register of electors. The eligibility requirements for voter registration in Saskatchewan are dictated by the Act. To be registered, an elector must be at least 18 years of age, a Canadian citizen, and resident in Saskatchewan for at least six months prior to the day on which the writ was issued.

A high-quality voters list is vital to administering an election. The list facilitates planning by ensuring that an appropriate number of voting locations are established in all parts of a constituency with sufficient supplies and staff. As well, the voters list creates an efficient voting experience by allowing the process of confirming one's eligibility to vote to be separated from the process of casting a ballot. With a good voters list, most voters can cast their ballot in only a few minutes. Finally, the voters list is an important tool for political parties and candidates, who use it to inform and engage voters. As has often been said, a successful election begins with a high-quality voters list.

Elections Saskatchewan adopted a permanent register of electors in advance of the province's 2016 election, conducting the last province-wide enumeration in the period leading up to that election. The register of electors is now kept up to date largely through data exchange agreements with agencies such as Elections Canada, SGI, and eHealth. A permanent register is usually more accurate than traditional enumeration and can reduce the need for voters to update their information when voting.

The 2024 election demonstrated that the permanent register is accomplishing that goal. As can be seen below, the use of a permanent register has reduced the changes in registration at the voting location by about half.

Voter Registration Changes at the Polls

Completely New Registrations   Updates to Existing Registration Information

> A high-quality voters list contributes to a much more efficient experience when voters cast a ballot.

Findings

It has become standard among election management bodies to measure the quality of a voters list according to three criteria: coverage, currency, and accuracy.

- **Coverage**, or **completeness**, refers to the percentage of voters who are registered compared to the number of eligible persons in the province.
- **Currency** is a measure of the relative decay of information from the time it is collected to the time it is needed. It refers to whether the list is up to date, e.g., whether an individual named at a specific address continues to reside at that location.
- **Accuracy** refers to whether the information on the list is correct. It includes the absence of spelling errors, data entry mistakes, or other more serious inaccuracies, such as the inclusion of ineligible or duplicate voters. It is the percentage of correctly listed names and addresses compared to the total number of names on the list.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that while having one's name on the voters list is a requirement for voting, it is ultimately an elector's choice whether to be included in the permanent register. Therefore, the quality of the voters list does not rest solely with the election management body; voters also bear responsibility for its quality.

Although there is no universally accepted standard for voter list quality, the Administration and Cost of Elections (ACE) project suggests reasonable targets of 90 percent for completeness, 85 percent for currency, and 97 percent for accuracy of voters lists.[3] The quality of the voters list can also be assessed by using the quality measures employed in the 2016 elections as a benchmark.

Coverage

The permanent register has produced a significant improvement in the quality of voter registration, as measured by coverage. Since 2011, the last provincial election featuring a door-to-door enumeration, coverage has increased from 77 percent to 98 percent.

Voters List Coverage
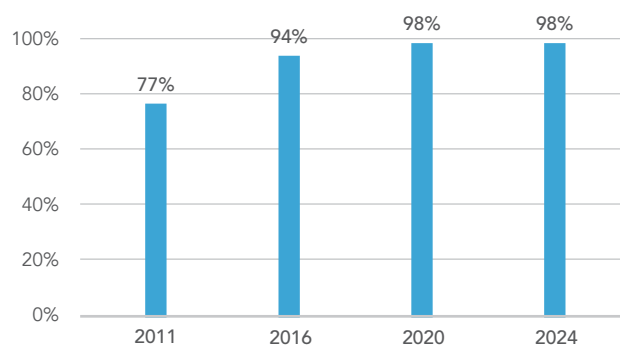
As can clearly be seen, Elections Saskatchewan has achieved a high degree of success both in implementing its permanent register of electors and in its register update strategies.

Currency

A high-quality voters list contributes to a much more efficient experience when voters cast a ballot. When the voter's identification matches their information on the voters list, election officials can immediately complete the strike-off and issue a ballot. However, if the information about the voter is either incorrect on the voters list, or missing, a revision of the voters list must take place in conjunction with voting to ensure that the eligible voter has the opportunity to vote.

Revisions at the voting place, conducted by the Deputy Returning Officer, can slow the voting process both for the voter whose information is being revised and for those in line behind them. A voters list with high currency minimizes this type of delay.

When measuring the currency of the permanent register, the starting point is a list of electors produced following

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3 For more information, visit https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/vr/introduction/vr20.

the close of the revision period. In 2024, this occurred on October 19. After that date, any changes in conjunction with voting indicate that the voter information is not current: either the voter is not on the voters list at all (e.g., because they recently reached voting age), or they have moved, and their address has not been updated.

For the 28th General Election in 2016, there were a total of 39,320 changes in registration in conjunction with voting, of which 13,435 were new registrations and 25,885 were changes to existing registrations. In 2020, the total changes dropped by 53 percent to 18,514, of which only 4,564 were new registrations and 13,950 were changes. Between 2016 and 2020, therefore, changes (not including new registrations) dropped by 46.1 percent. In 2024, there were 21,913 total changes, of which 8,226 were new registrations and 12,913 were changes to existing registrations. Again excluding new registrations, polling officials conducted half as many changes in registrations in 2024 as in 2016, and about 1,000 fewer than in 2020.

Thus, the permanent voter register continues to deliver significant efficiency without inhibiting participation from those not reflected on the register. Its high degree of currency ensures that the vast majority of voters receive all the benefits of being registered in advance of the election, such as receiving a Voter Information Card. And Elections Saskatchewan's high commitment to voter participation ensures that those who are registered incorrectly or not at all are enabled to correct the record rather than be excluded from voting.

Accuracy

The third measure of the quality of a voters list is the accuracy of the information. Although all election management bodies in Canada make efforts to ensure that only eligible electors are included on the voters list, it is a constant struggle. Among other factors, there is typically a lag between the time that an elector moves or passes away, and the date when this information is received at Elections Saskatchewan. There are also inevitable transcription errors in the names or addresses of some electors. Although opportunities exist for electors to inform the election management body about such errors, they are not always pursued.

Elections Saskatchewan does not add a voter to the register unless the individual has proactively given their

consent and attested to their eligibility. The resulting consent-based list is continually updated via data sharing agreements with other government agencies. This includes Elections Canada, which checks its list against data provided by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). Elections Saskatchewan also strengthens the accuracy of the register by communicating directly with electors about eligibility requirements, advising them about the information currently included on the voters list, and updating the list as appropriate based on their information and requests.

Leading to the 2020 and 2024 elections, Elections Saskatchewan did not undertake an assessment of the accuracy of the voters list due to the cost and time involved in doing so. However, indirect assessments can be used to evaluate its accuracy.

One such method of indirect evaluation is the survey of voters and non-voters described in Chapter 2. The survey probed respondents' experience with Voter Information Cards (VIC), the information for which is drawn from the voters list. VICs are one of the key methods used by Elections Saskatchewan to communicate with electors about when, where, and how to vote, and they are a popular source of election information for voters. When asked where they received voter information from Elections Saskatchewan, the most common response from voters is the VIC (62 percent). About nine in 10 respondents in the survey of voters indicated they received a VIC from Elections Saskatchewan, results similar to 2020. Seventy percent said they received it through regular mail (compared to 87 percent in 2020), and 18 percent indicated receiving it by SMS text message or email. Nine percent of respondents in both 2024 and 2020 indicated they did not receive a VIC. When asked whether their VIC was accurate, 98 percent of respondents confirmed that it was, similar to the 97 percent who said it was in 2020. Ninety-four percent of respondents said they were satisfied with the communications they received from the Voter Information Card.

Taken together, these numbers indicate a very high-quality permanent register in Saskatchewan. Available evidence indicates the register scores high on all three measures of quality – completeness, currency, and accuracy – and that it has improved markedly upon the voters list created by a door-to-door enumeration in advance of the 2011

election. Survey research also shows a very high degree of satisfaction with the permanent register among voters.

Ease of Use

One can examine the usefulness of the voters list in Saskatchewan from a number of perspectives – those of the voters, of election staff, and of political parties and candidates. Drawing on data from the survey of 2,100 voters and non-voters conducted in the weeks following the election, about eight in 10 said they were on the voters list, one in 10 said they were not, and one in 10 said they didn't know if they were on the voters list. Of those who knew whether they were on the voters list, about nine in 10 said they were, similar to 2020. Of those who registered during the pre-election period or in conjunction with voting, about 85 percent indicated that doing so was easy, somewhat lower than the 98 percent who held this view in 2020. Of the very few individual respondents (18 people) who said that voter registration was difficult, the most common reasons cited were that they were confused about voter ID requirements (46 percent), they didn't know what they had to do to register (27 percent) and the line-ups to register were long (24 percent).

Election officials also tend to hold positive views of voter registration and the voters list. In online surveys, 92 percent of the Field Leadership Team (FLT) reported satisfaction with the quality of voter registration, the same percentage as in 2020. Regarding attitudes towards the accuracy of the Voter Information Cards, the findings were more nuanced. For those who worked in technology constituencies, about 96 percent were satisfied with the accuracy of the VICs, an increase from the 92 percent who held this view in 2020. However, FLT satisfaction was not as overwhelmingly high in the non-technology constituencies, with 80 percent saying they were satisfied with the printed VICs and 95 percent saying they were satisfied with the electronic VICs. Further exploration of this finding indicated that in some rural areas, the VICs contained voters' mailing address and not their residential address, which caused concerns. Despite this caveat, FLT attitudes towards VICs were very positive overall. Similarly, Voting Week workers also held a positive view of voter registration, in which about nine in 10 reported that they agreed with the statement "The Registration process was correctly administered," down slightly from the 94 percent of election workers who held this view in 2020.

In order to gauge the views of a number of election stakeholders, focus groups were commissioned with a variety of stakeholder groups. Participants in the focus group for voters with disabilities suggested that Elections Saskatchewan continue to work on the Voter Information Cards to ensure that information provided on the VIC is accessible to all voters, particularly those with special needs.

Interviews were also conducted with party leaders (when available) and parties' Chief Official Agents. Perhaps the most positive comments about voter registration and the voters list came from these interviews. Due to some electoral modernization initiatives that had been introduced by Elections Saskatchewan, the election management body was able to provide a more timely and complete list of voters who had already voted and had been struck off the voters list throughout the period of voting. Prior to 2020, political parties and candidates had to rely on candidate representatives (sometimes called scrutineers) visiting polling places to obtain this information for their "get-out-the-vote" efforts. For the 2020 and 2024 elections, Elections Saskatchewan provided this information directly to the parties throughout the voting process, thereby allowing them to be much more efficient in their efforts to contact and mobilize their supporters. Senior staff in a number of political parties were enthusiastic in their support for these procedures. When computer technology is used for voter strike-off, as it was in the 2024 election's technology constituencies, it is a relatively seamless process to provide this information to parties and candidates; however, it is much more labour-intensive to track who has voted at voting locations using the traditional paper-based list.

Election Workers

Recruitment of workers is a critical task for any election management body. Administering voting remains a very manual, labour-intensive activity in most jurisdictions around the world.

For the 30th General Election, Elections Saskatchewan's head office team hired a Field Leadership Team (FLT) comprising 61 Returning Officers (ROs), 61 Election Clerks (ECs), and 10 Supervisory Returning Officers (SROs).

For administrative purposes, the province was divided into nine zones, and each zone was assigned an SRO

who supported the ROs and ECs. To provide greater consistency in support of First Nations communities and voters, Elections Saskatchewan also appointed an SRO for First Nations.

The FLT was recruited throughout the 30th electoral cycle in anticipation of a fall 2024 election, with a target of completing the hiring of all FLT staff by February 1, 2024, in preparation for the first set of training sessions that took place in Regina and Saskatoon in April 2024.

In 2024, ROs, supported by ECs, hired an average of 70 election workers per constituency, down significantly from the 179 workers per constituency required in 2020. However, this overall average masks key differences between those constituencies (primarily urban) that used new technology for voter strike-off and those (primarily rural) that did not.

In urban constituencies, changes were made to streamline staffing, partly to ease the burden of recruitment and training for the FLT, while still ensuring accessible voting. On average, only 50 workers were hired per urban constituency. This reduction was made possible by consolidating voting locations and eliminating certain roles, such as poll clerks.

In contrast, rural non-technology constituencies hired an average of 96 workers each. Although staffing was still lower than it was in 2020, rural areas maintained a relatively high number of voting places by combining polling divisions. This approach reduced staffing needs while still limiting travel distances for voters and keeping wait times low, showing that a degree of modernization and improvement is possible even without the implementation of voter strike-off technology.

Elections Saskatchewan recruited roughly 4,500 temporary workers[4] to administer voting services at 882 voting locations across the province during Voting Week in 2024. This is a significant reduction from the approximately 11,000 temporary workers hired to administer voting in 2020 at 3,132 regular and advance voting locations. In addition, about 20 full-time or part-time staff were hired to administer the Vote by Mail process at head

office, similar to the number employed for the same purpose in 2024.

The recruitment of election workers is one of the biggest challenges faced by the FLT in each election cycle. Elections Saskatchewan has therefore tried to reshape the voting process to simplify the work of staffing the voting place. In both technology constituencies and non-technology constituencies, there were fewer voting places on the first five days of voting of the 30th General Election than in previous years. This continued through the last day of voting in the technology constituencies, which were also able to eliminate the position of polling clerk. These changes had a big impact on the experience of FLT members. When asked how easy it was to recruit election workers, only 16.3 percent of those in technology constituencies said it was difficult, compared to 61.7 percent of FLT members in 2020 (the pandemic election) and 45 percent in 2016. Of the 2024 FLT members in non-technology constituencies, 32.5 percent said recruitment was difficult for the first five days of voting, and 37.5 percent said they had difficulty recruiting for the last day of voting, which required staffing for many more voting places. All the respondents in the technology constituencies said that the use of fewer voting places made recruitment easier, whereas about two thirds (69.2 percent) said the requirement to have election workers work all six days of voting made recruitment more difficult.

Election Year	Type of Constituency Worked	Percent Who Said Recruitment of Election Workers is Very or Somewhat Difficult
2016	All polls	45.0%
2020	All polls	61.7%
2024	Technology voting locations	16.3%
	Non-technology voting locations, first five days of voting	32.5%
	Non-technology voting locations, last day of voting	37.5%

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[4] The total number of temporary workers in an election always remains an estimate as there are last minute additions and subtractions due to everyday occurrences such as sickness.

The extremely long workday for election workers continued to contribute to recruitment challenges in 2024, as it has in all previous elections. On the last day of voting, election workers were required to arrive before voting locations opened at 9 a.m., work continuously until the close of voting at 8 p.m., and then undertake the challenging task of ballot counting. When asked what changes, if any, they would recommend for future elections, one of the most common responses among Voting Week workers was a suggestion to reduce the number of consecutive hours they are required to work. However, the highly prescriptive elements of the Act restrict Elections Saskatchewan's ability to adjust working conditions for election workers, regardless of the fact that these conditions appear out of step with contemporary expectations of workers.

One of the initiatives that continues to support recruitment is the Take Part Program, first introduced in advance of the 2016 election as a way of enabling people to register their interest in working for Elections Saskatchewan during an election. The program fosters the development of a community through regular emails informing members of election-related news and employment opportunities. When asked whether the Take Part Program assisted with their recruitment efforts, 80 percent of FLT members said it helped, the same percentage who said it helped in 2020 and slightly more than the 75 percent who said so in 2016. The effectiveness of this program also is apparent from responses to the question of how many election workers were recruited through this program. In the technology constituencies, 46 percent said most of their workers were recruited through the Take Part Program, nine percent said about half, and 15 percent said about a quarter were recruited from this pool. In the non-technology constituencies, 18 percent said most of their workers were recruited through the Take Part Program, 30 percent said half, and 20 percent said a quarter were from this pool.

Elections Saskatchewan data on recruitment show that 44.6 percent of all staff hired for the election in 2024 were recruited from Take Part. This suggests that the Take Part Program was equally or more important as a recruitment tool in 2024 as it was in 2020, when 17 percent said most of their Election Day workers were recruited through the Take Part Program, 29 percent said about half, and 31 percent said about a quarter were recruited from this pool. The Take Part Program is an important recruitment tool for the FLT that should be further enhanced throughout the electoral cycle.

The training of election workers is a challenge for all election management bodies. Most workers have not done the job previously, and most will work for only a few days or perhaps only the last day of voting. To prepare election workers for their roles, Elections Saskatchewan used a variety of training methods, almost all of which went through significant updates and revisions following the 2020 election. Training methods included written material, online resources, in-person training sessions for some positions, and manuals for all positions. The training proved effective: 93 percent of election workers in technology constituencies and 92 percent in non-technology constituencies said their training prepared them to be successful with their work, compared to 85 percent of election workers who felt this way in 2020 and in 2016. About 85 percent expressed satisfaction with the quality of online and written materials and with the manuals for their positions.

Election Year	Type of Constituency Worked	Percent Saying Training Was Very or Somewhat Effective in Preparing Them for Their Job
2016	All constituencies	85%
2020	All constituencies	85%
2024	Technology constituencies	93%
	Non-technology constituencies	92%

When assessing the effectiveness of election workers, it is important to remember that for the voting public, these workers are the face of Elections Saskatchewan. They are the ones who interact directly with voters. Consequently, voters' perceptions of their interactions are probably the most important metric of the effectiveness of this group. In the survey of voters, almost all respondents (96 percent) said they were satisfied or felt neutral about their interaction with election workers, a figure which is unchanged since 2020.

Broadly speaking, the demographics of the FLT have remained the same for the past election cycles, with a slight difference in the most recent election between technology and non-technology constituencies.

Field Leadership Team Demographics

Legend:
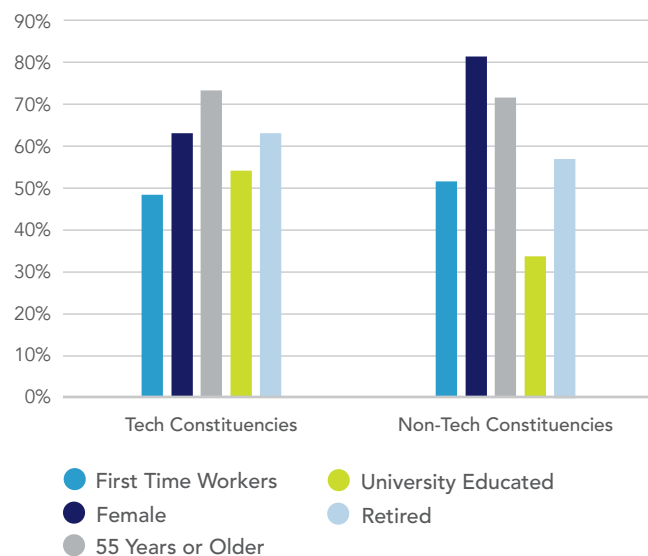- First Time Workers
- 60 Years or Older
- Female
- Retired
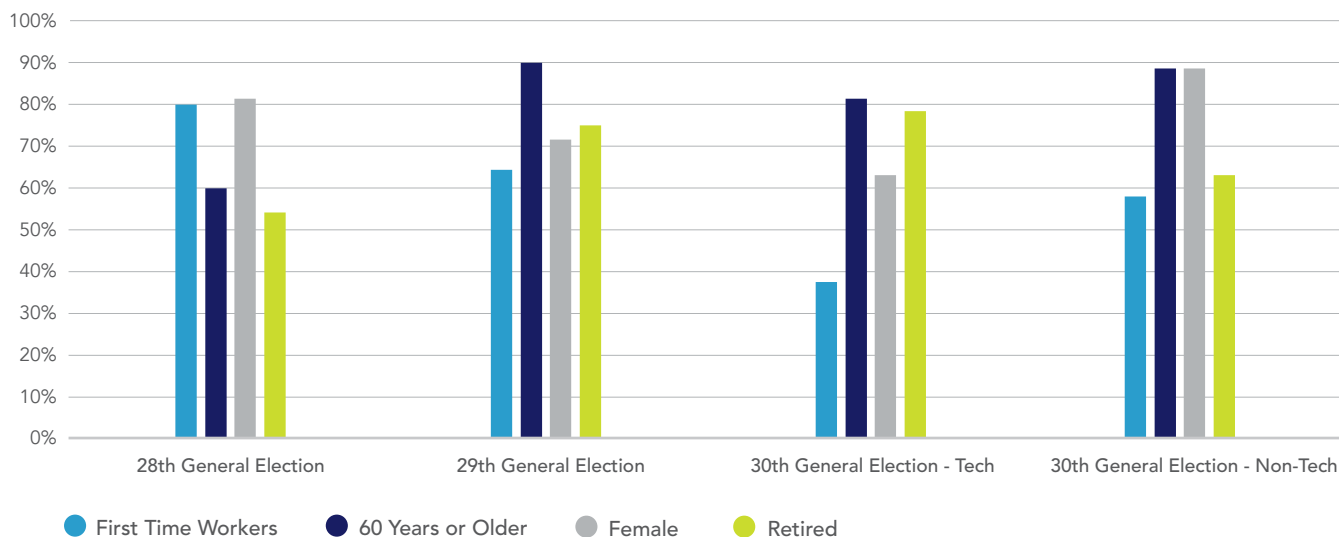
As with the previous elections, the profile of election workers is broadly similar, with slight differences between technology and non-technology constituencies.

30th General Election Election Worker Demographics

Legend:
- First Time Workers
- Female
- 55 Years or Older
- University Educated
- Retired

Findings

Election management bodies are unique organizations, where a small core of permanent staff develops policies and procedures under the guidance and direction of a Chief Electoral Officer, and their implementation falls almost entirely to a much larger team of temporary staff. Developing positive relationships and interactions between the head office staff and the field staff, particularly those who hold positions as members of the FLT, is especially important for the success of the organization.

In the survey of the FLT, respondents were asked to comment on various aspects of the election. As the chart to the right shows, satisfaction with all elements of the election is very high among FLT members. They were very pleased with overall election planning, their training (which experienced a marked improvement since 2020), the performance of election workers, the quality of printed election materials and electronic equipment in their office, the materials for setting up returning offices, and the quality of the voters list.

FLT Satisfaction with Various Elements of the Election (Percent Satisfied)

Satisfaction with Item	GE 29 All Constituencies	GE 30 Technology Constituency	GE 30 Non-Technology Constituency
Overall election planning	*	86%	93%
Your training	73%	95%	88%
Performance of election workers	89%	90%	90%
Quality of printed election material	*	85%	86%
Quality of electronic equipment in returning office	*	93%	93%
Material for returning office set-up	*	93%	98%
Quality of voters list	*	92%	93%
Support from head office	93%	95%	95%

*Not asked in 2020

On the key question of the relationship between head office and the field offices, satisfaction was very high, and this proved vital for the successful delivery of the election. Respondents were asked about their assessment of support from head office and from the head office support desk. Particularly notable was the continuation, and even growth, in satisfaction with support from head office. This registered at 95 percent satisfaction amongst those in the technology and non-technology constituencies alike, a slight increase from the 93 percent who were satisfied in 2020, and significantly higher than 2016's 72 percent. Satisfaction with the help desk was reported by 83 percent in technology constituencies and 78 percent in non-technology constituencies, similar to the 85 percent and 80 percent reporting satisfaction with the help desk in 2020 and 2016, respectively. In response to the question of whether they felt part of the Elections Saskatchewan team, 97 percent in both the technology and non-technology constituencies said they did, compared to 90 percent in 2020 and 78 percent in 2016.

The success of Elections Saskatchewan will continue to be dependent upon its ability to recruit and train a very large temporary workforce to implement the core

> The success of Elections Saskatchewan will continue to be dependent upon its ability to recruit and train a very large temporary workforce…

policies and procedures of the Chief Electoral Officer, with the assistance of a relatively small permanent staff. This is no small task. However, recent changes in election administration have eased the burden of recruitment. For example, shifting to a Voting Week and using the same staff for all six days of voting in the technology constituencies, with fewer voting locations on the last day of voting, have led to a decrease in staffing requirements in those constituencies.

Although the legislature has not adopted the CEO's recommendation to provide greater flexibility in the size of polling divisions, a CEO Directive (approved by the Board of Internal Economy) authorized the use of

"catchment areas" for each constituency, providing a specific voting location for every voter on the last day of voting. This provision, which was particularly valuable in rural areas, supplied voters with the same number of voting locations (and thus the same travel distance and time), while also using a more optimally proportioned workforce. The increased use of technology in some voting places has also eased the recruitment burden, as it has enabled a reconfiguration of staffing positions, the elimination of the poll clerk position in those voting places, and the introduction of the ballot box official. These efforts to modernize the voting experience and satisfy voter expectations – while also easing the burden of staff recruitment – were a notable success in the 30th General Election that should be continued and expanded.

Notwithstanding these improvements, however, *The Election Act, 1996* remains highly prescriptive in its description of voting processes, mandating the configuration of staffing at voting locations and placing limits on the number of electors per polling division. These administrative matters could be addressed more efficiently and effectively if left to the informed judgment of the Chief Electoral Officer and the professional staff at Elections Saskatchewan. Providing greater latitude to the Chief Electoral Officer to exercise electoral best practices on such matters as staffing, polling division size, and polling place configuration would help Elections Saskatchewan offer the best possible voting experience for electors, while continuing to serve the needs of electoral stakeholders.

Significant improvements to training of election workers were introduced in advance of the 2016, 2020, and 2024 elections. This new training approach embraces blended learning, consisting of in-person learning complemented by online materials. Informed by the study of adult learning, it also emphasizes the efficacy of hands-on problem-solving during in-person instruction. It is important to continue investing in these valuable training approaches as we strive to professionalize the staffing of Elections Saskatchewan's field offices.

The FLT indicated that they felt better trained in 2024 than in previous elections, a gratifying outcome in view of the resources expended to enhance the training of this important group. Going forward, extending the length of

appointment for Returning Officers and Election Clerks could significantly increase the value of this investment for the people of Saskatchewan. Several other jurisdictions have already made adjustments to the appointment, tenure, and duties of Field Leadership Teams in response to the increasing complexity of election management, and Saskatchewan would be well-served to follow suit.

Constituency Voting Locations and Office Space

In each of Saskatchewan's 61 constituencies, the returning office serves as the headquarters of voting operations for the constituency. The returning office accommodates planning, recruitment, and (in some cases) training. It is the place for the receipt and distribution of voting supplies and serves as the hub for candidate nominations and other election-related functions. Returning offices are expected to be fully accessible and require other features such as adequate parking and security.

In general, Elections Saskatchewan seeks to locate each returning office within the constituency that it services. At times, however, greater efficiencies and greater compliance with accessibility requirements can be achieved by co-locating two or more returning offices in the same facility, placing at least one office outside its constituency. In 2024, 36 returning offices were independent, while the remaining 25 returning offices shared space in 10 locations. One location had four returning offices, three locations had three returning offices each, and six locations had two returning offices. In total, 19 returning offices were outside the constituency they served. All 61 returning offices met all accessibility requirements.

The configuration of returning offices has changed over the past several elections, particularly in regard to the strategy of sharing space. In 2020, 49 were located within and 12 were outside the constituency they served (the same number as in 2016), while three shared space with another returning office. All 61 returning offices used during the 2020 election met all mandatory accessibility requirements. For the 2016 election, six of the returning offices were established in shared office facilities with another returning office outside the constituency boundaries, and another six returning offices were established as stand-alone offices outside the constituency.

High accessibility standards also apply to voting places. Returning Officers are required to identify any deficiencies in the accessibility of voting places and justify the use of that voting place if it is deficient. Relevant standards include adequate parking to meet anticipated demand, the existence of ramps and 36-inch doorways to ensure wheelchair accessibility (although Elections Saskatchewan can provide ramps if necessary), barrier-free facilities, elevators as required, and a fully accessible voting booth area.

In the 2024 election, there were 137 voting locations in the technology constituencies. All of them were fully accessible. During the first five days of voting there were 166 voting places in the non-technology constituencies, and all but one of these was fully accessible: a 99.4 percent compliance rate. On the last day of voting there were an additional 579 voting places in the non-technology constituencies. Of these, four were not fully accessible, for a compliance rate of 99.3 percent.

The data on accessibility compliance in 2024 compare favourably to the 2020 and 2016 elections. During the 2020 election, six of the 243 advance polling (2.5 percent) and 49 of the 1,345 Election Day voting locations (3.6 percent) did not comply with all accessibility requirements, for an overall compliance of 96.6 percent. For the 2016 election, of the approximately 1,700 voting locations, five advance voting and 14 Election Day voting locations did not meet the desired standards for accessibility by voters with disabilities, and no alternative facilities that were both accessible and available could be found in those communities. Therefore, 98.9 percent of polling places met all desired accessibility criteria, including level access, during that event.

Despite efforts to achieve 100 percent accessibility compliance, the Accessibility Plan anticipates that there may be less than 100 percent compliance for voting location accessibility. Elections Saskatchewan provides alternative measures (including curbside voting and expanded use of absentee balloting) to ensure that all voters have access to the ballot even when a facility is not fully compliant with the standards.

The data on accessibility compliance in 2024 compare favourably to the 2020 and 2016 elections.

2020 Accessibility of Voting Locations
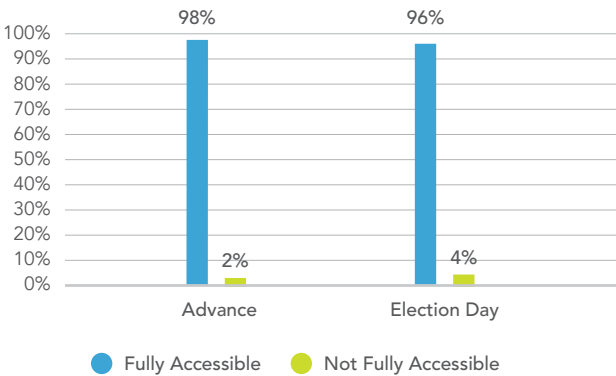
2024 Accessibility of Voting Locations
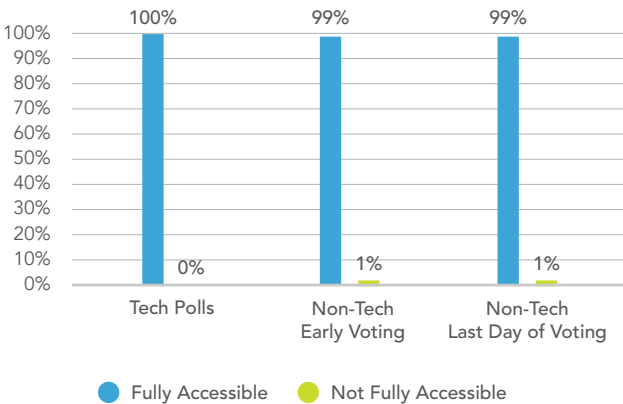
Findings
Almost without exception, Returning Officers were able to obtain good quality spaces for their returning offices. Ninety-five percent of Returning Officers and Election Clerks in the technology constituencies, and all 100 percent in non-technology constituencies, said they were satisfied with their office space. This was similar to the 98 percent who said they were satisfied with their office space in 2020.

There was also a high level of satisfaction with several different elements of office space. Notably, however, satisfaction was higher in the rural non-technology constituencies than in the urban technology

constituencies. For example, 95 percent of Returning Officers in the technology constituencies said they were satisfied with the lead time in taking possession of their offices, and 87 percent said they had a sufficient budget for their office, but only 75 percent were satisfied with the dimensions of their available office space. The comparable figures for those in non-technology constituencies were 100 percent satisfied with the possession date, 94 percent satisfied with the office space budget, and 87 percent satisfied with the dimensions of their office. Rates of satisfaction with these dimensions in 2020 were largely parallel to those in the non-technology constituencies in 2024. In 2020, 97 percent of Returning Officers and Election Clerks agreed that they were able to take possession of their space with sufficient lead time, 95 percent agreed that they had a sufficient budget to secure the type of space required, and 85 percent said the amount of space was suitable.

It is increasingly challenging for Returning Officers to secure appropriate office space for their returning offices. For example, in 2020, 69 percent of Returning Officers said they only had one option to choose from for their returning office. While most were able to secure it, it does highlight a significant challenge. These challenges were even more significant in 2024: In the non-technology constituencies, only 43 percent said it was easy to find office space, and only five percent said they had multiple options from which to choose. In the technology constituencies, only 27 percent said office space was easy to find, and slightly over a quarter (27 percent) said they had multiple office locations from which to choose.

Elections Saskatchewan has made great strides in providing fully accessible office space and voting locations. It is crucial to continue these efforts. Due to the high priority of accessibility, Returning Officers are empowered to choose facilities outside their constituency if necessary to ensure that they meet accessibility requirements.

Voters with Disabilities

Following consultations with disability groups in 2019, Elections Saskatchewan adopted the Open Accessibility Plan, based on the principle that the ideal voting experience for persons with disabilities is "to vote independently, in private, and with dignity." The emphasis on providing accessibility in all the facilities used by Elections Saskatchewan, including head office, returning offices, and voting places, has become a key driver in Elections

Saskatchewan's planning and its training of election officials. Securing appropriate spaces for the returning office and voting locations is a key pre-writ activity for Returning Officers. Training sessions and manuals emphasize the importance of meeting accessibility standards such as ensuring adequate parking, level access to buildings, wide doorways and passages, appropriate signage, and sufficient lighting. There also has been increased emphasis in training both the Field Leadership Team and Voting Week workers on the importance of treating all voters, including those with disabilities, with dignity and respect.

The Open Accessibility Plan goes beyond physical space and welcoming attitudes. A key component of the plan is making the voting process more accessible to all eligible voters. Voting opportunities have been expanded by the recent expansion of Vote by Mail, offering voting in hospitals and personal care facilities, and making Voting Week a seamless experience. Accessibility has been increased for seniors by providing homebound voting and, in some assisted living facilities, mobile homebound polls to serve residents with mobility limitations. There are also provisions to ensure that voters can obtain assistance from a trusted friend upon request, and provisions to allow voters to use cell phones or other devices if doing so assists in their voting experience.

The focus on accessibility also led Elections Saskatchewan to hire and train people with disabilities to work as election officials. As part of this effort, a program was launched in partnership with SaskAbilities in 2024 to hire 24 of their clients to work as Information Officers at voting locations, helping to build an inclusive workplace. Elections Saskatchewan also continues to forge relationships with organizations that support voters with disabilities, seeking ongoing advice on ways in which the voting experience can be improved for their members.

Findings
As noted in the section on constituency voting locations and office space, all returning offices in 2024 met all accessibility requirements, as they had in 2020. Further, in technology constituencies, there was 100 percent compliance with accessibility requirements for all voting locations. In non-technology voting locations, compliance was slightly lower at 99.4 percent, an improvement over the 96.6 percent compliance in 2020. As in the past, when dealing with voting places that were not fully accessible,

> The improved accessibility of early voting and Election Day voting was well received by both election workers and voters, including voters with disabilities.

Elections Saskatchewan provided information on the Voter Information Card advising voters of accessible alternatives. In addition, the recent expansion of absentee voting through the Vote by Mail process has enabled any voter, including voters with disabilities, to vote without leaving their home. Homebound voting also allows those with mobility issues to vote from their home if they request.

The improved accessibility of early voting and Election Day voting was well received by both election workers and voters, including voters with disabilities. Election workers in both technology and non-technology constituencies expressed satisfaction with the accessibility of voting places for early voting (93 percent and 95 percent, respectively), as well as for voting on the last day of voting (93 percent and 94 percent, respectively). This is very similar to the findings in 2020, in which 96 percent of workers at advance and Election Day polls were satisfied with the accessibility of their voting location. Voters showed a similar level of satisfaction. Overall 95 percent of voters said they were satisfied with or felt neutral about the accessibility of voting places in 2024. When voters with specific disabilities were asked about their satisfaction with the accessibility of voting places, 88 percent with sight impairment, 89 percent with mobility impairment, 92 percent with hearing impairment, and 95 percent with some other impairment indicated they were satisfied. In comparison, 97 percent of those with no impairment said they were satisfied with the accessibility of voting places. By all of the measures, it appears that the Elections Saskatchewan approach has effectively reduced barriers to voting related to the physical accessibility of voting places.

An accessible election for all voters goes beyond the physical accessibility of voting locations. It also includes diverse voting options (such as Vote by Mail, homebound, or curbside voting), good support systems (such as providing magnifiers for ballots or permitting the use of helpers or assistants while voting), and good communication and information sources (including, for example, the use of TTY or braille). The commitment to a multi-pronged approach to accessibility is reflected in levels of satisfaction. For example, when voters were surveyed about their satisfaction with their overall voting experience and the ease of voting, responses were extremely positive both among those who said they had a disability and those who did not. Rates of satisfaction with the overall voting experience registered at 95 percent for sight impaired, 98 percent for mobility impaired, 96 percent for hearing impaired, and 96 percent of those with some other impairment, compared to a similar level of satisfaction of 97 percent among those with no impairment. Very similar percentages said that voting was easy (97 percent, 98 percent, 96 percent, 99 percent, and 97 percent, respectively).

Some participants in focus groups noted an opportunity for improvement, drawing attention to the lack of an option on Vote by Mail ballots for those with visual impairment. Despite this, however, the focus group participants emphasized their positive experiences with election workers. The following comment by a member of the focus group is illustrative:

> "I think this was one of the first years I've really seen a huge impact on how the folks at the stations were identifying one with the disability, especially someone with vision loss, and addressing it in a very dignified, respectful way. I think this was the first time in, gosh, I don't want to say my age, but in say 35, 40 years of voting, this was the very first time I've really seen a real upsurge in the accessibility, the respect, and dignity from the staffers and the volunteers that assisted you in getting your vote across."

Data from the survey of Voting Week workers indicated that 10 percent of workers at voting locations in technology constituencies and seven percent in non-technology constituencies identified as a person with a disability. When people with disabilities among the Election Day workers survey group were asked about working with Elections Saskatchewan, over 80 percent agreed that Elections Saskatchewan does a good job hiring people with disabilities (82 percent in the technology constituencies and 85 percent in non-technology constituencies), and 80 percent in each group said Elections Saskatchewan provides

good job training. This compares to about 80 percent in 2020 who said Elections Saskatchewan does a good job hiring people with disabilities and 80 percent who said they do a good job training people with disabilities. Over eight in 10 respondents in the technology constituencies said Elections Saskatchewan does a good job encouraging people with disabilities to get involved in provincial elections (82.8 percent) and provides good supervisory opportunities (83.9 percent). Among those in non-technology constituencies the comparable figures are 72.6 percent and 75.7 percent.

Notwithstanding these generally positive assessments, the low percentage of persons with disabilities working either as election workers or as part of the FLT suggests that more can and should be done to employ persons with disabilities, and more than 25 percent of voters agree with this view. The successful partnership with SaskAbilities to hire 24 of their staff as Information Officers demonstrates that engaging the disability community in support of this objective is a timely and effective way of addressing this challenge and opportunity.

Participants in the focus group noted the positive outcomes arising from consultations between Elections Saskatchewan and the disability communities and encouraged a continuation of those discussions. Over the past two elections, Elections Saskatchewan has made significant strides in improving voting accessibility for those with physical disabilities. The next step in advancing voting accessibility in Saskatchewan is the study of barriers faced by those with intellectual disabilities, and the development and implementation of best practices in this area as well.

First Nations Voters

Saskatchewan has 74 First Nations, with a total First Nations population in 2021 of 121,175.[5] There are five major linguistic groups: Cree, Dakota, Dene (Chipewyan), Nakota (Assiniboine), and Salteaux. As of 2021, 47.8 percent of status First Nations peoples in Saskatchewan live on First Nations' land, down from 50.5 percent in 2016.

Elections Saskatchewan has been implementing a strategy of long-term engagement with First Nations leadership and community members since the 2016 election, under the rubric of the First Nations Electoral Access Initiative. Following the 29th General Election in 2020, Elections

Saskatchewan articulated five commitments that focused its activities leading up to the 30th General Election in 2024. Elections Saskatchewan committed to do the following:

- Build relationships with First Nation communities through outreach that focuses on maintaining ongoing, deep, and long-term engagement with community leaders.
- Develop and implement a recruitment and training strategy for First Nations citizens.
- Review the languages in which election materials are translated to ensure translations meet current needs and community expectations.
- Build upon Elections Saskatchewan's success in outreach by focusing on barriers experienced by other groups such as First Nations voters not living on First Nations' land and Métis voters.
- Begin to formalize administrative relationships between Elections Saskatchewan and First Nations.

The commitments are a formal intention of action as well as principles for future and ongoing activities.

Elections Saskatchewan created a new senior position, the Supervisory Returning Officer for First Nations, tasked with putting personnel in place to facilitate relationship building with First Nations leadership. The SRO for First Nations also provides enhanced capacity within Elections Saskatchewan to support Returning Officers' interactions with First Nations.

Additional action items under the First Nations Electoral Access Initiative included continuing outreach, attendance at First Nations cultural events, and a series of key communications between the CEO and First Nations leaders, including Memoranda of Understanding between a number of Chiefs and the Chief Electoral Officer to further mutual respect and collaboration. One important communication was the publication in *Eagle Feather News* of an op-ed by the Chief Electoral Officer entitled "SaskVotes 2024: Working Collaboratively to Build Relationships and Trust."

To help with recruitment and training, Elections Saskatchewan implemented a pilot project known as the Supervisory Deputy Returning Officer – Enhanced (SDRO-E) position. The initial vision for the project consisted of hiring

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[5] These numbers can be found at https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/page.cfm?lang=E&topic=8&dguid=2021A000247.

up to 10 SDRO-E positions to help Returning Officers in their local-level interactions with First Nations communities, including sourcing voting places and recruiting First Nations election workers for voting locations on First Nations' land. However, overwhelming demand resulted in a significant expansion of the project. In the end, the project included 55 recruits, with an SDRO-E assigned to each of the 88 voting locations on First Nations' land. SDRO-Es also assist with training, recruitment, and even filling in as necessary.

Translation of election materials into First Nations languages focused on Cree and Dene in the 30th General Election. The SDRO-E played a key role in getting translated materials placed in band offices and other public spaces. Elections Saskatchewan is continuing consultations to determine what other languages are appropriate candidates for translation services, and to identify the availability of translation services in those languages.

In addition to First Nations engagement, Elections Saskatchewan continues to pursue ways of fostering a long-term relationship with Metis Nation – Saskatchewan (MN-S), including the circulation of election materials to Metis voters through MN-S. Efforts to strengthen the relationship have begun to bear fruit, particularly with some local representatives. Elections Saskatchewan executed nine MOUs with First Nations and Metis communities prior to the 2024 election and will continue outreach activities to support the development and execution of additional MOUs to foster ongoing collaboration and build long-term partnerships with these communities.

As in recent elections, Elections Saskatchewan continues to collaborate with an international team of experts in election administration to conduct a series of meetings with First Nations bands. In June 2022, the CEO travelled to a number of remote (largely fly-in) communities with a team from International Foundation on Electoral Systems (IFES) for discussions with band leadership. The following year, in June 2023, a team of international observers from IFES and the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School visited six First Nations communities, and in November 2024 Elections Saskatchewan and IFES visited another six First Nations communities. These initiatives provide an opportunity for Elections Saskatchewan to learn first-hand what initiatives are effective in developing trust between First Nations leaders and Elections Saskatchewan, leading to meaningful and lasting collaboration.

Findings
Immediately following the 2016 election, Elections Saskatchewan engaged focus groups of First Nations voters to understand the effectiveness of communications and outreach materials. These conversations led to a much better understanding of the diversity of First Nations communities, resulting in targeted materials that better reflected the interests and life experiences of both northern and southern First Nations. It is now time to review the translations of these materials to ensure that they are providing accurate messaging to First Nations linguistic groups.

Over the year prior to the 29th General Election, Elections Saskatchewan worked in collaboration with Chiefs and band officials to ensure the provision of voting places on First Nations' land and to ensure that First Nations voters, like others, could be served by residents of their own community.

In both 2020 and 2024, Elections Saskatchewan focused on ensuring the presence of voting locations on First Nations' land that would be open for the entirety of Voting Week (formerly known as advance and Election Day polls). As legislation requires these voting locations to be open for the first five days to all electors throughout the constituency, they represented not only a means of providing voting services to First Nations electors, but also an opportunity for First Nations to strengthen relationships with their neighbours.

To that end, Elections Saskatchewan offered to establish a voting location at each First Nation in the province for the 2024 election. In the end, these discussions with First Nations leaders resulted in voting locations on 66 First Nations. This represents a slight decline from 2020, when 69 First Nations allowed voting locations on their land; however, the total number of voting locations on First Nations' land increased from 80 locations in 2020 to 83 in 2024. The number of voting locations open for the entirety of Voting Week increased from seven advance polls (as they were then known) in 2020 to 17 full Voting Week voting locations in 2024. The practice of voting in one's own community is vital for removing barriers to voting and demonstrating that this is an event in which all voters play a part.

In the 30th General Election, 4.5 percent of election workers in the technology constituencies were Indigenous and 7.8 percent of election workers in non-technology

constituencies were Indigenous. This compares to the 6.9 percent of election workers in 2020 who were Indigenous. The election workers in 2024 were asked about the hiring, training, and supervisory practices of Elections Saskatchewan as it relates to First Nations people, and the results were positive. 70.8 percent in technology constituencies and 86.6 percent in non-technology constituencies said Elections Saskatchewan does a good job of hiring Indigenous workers. Satisfaction with training was even higher. 95.7 percent in technology constituencies and 89.9 percent in non-technology constituencies said Elections Saskatchewan provides good training for First Nations workers.

While Elections Saskatchewan must continue to expand its recruitment and training strategy to ensure that First Nations are adequately represented at voting locations, the data indicate that collaboration with First Nations on election administration is beginning to bear fruit. The benefits of this collaboration are two-fold. First, placement of voting places on First Nations' land, staffed by workers from First Nations communities, ensure that First Nations voters are provided with an important service not previously available to them. It also allows First Nations bands to play host to the broader community, as all residents of a constituency are eligible to attend any voting location they choose within the constituency.

All of these successes in the 2024 election – adoption of the SRO for First Nations, implementation and expansion of SDRO-E pilot project, translation and distribution of regionally targeted materials in Cree and Dene, execution of MOUs with First Nations and Metis communities, meaningful consultation with First Nations, and the increasing number of voting locations on First Nations' land – demonstrate that Elections Saskatchewan's outreach to First Nations is clearly succeeding. The long-term relationship-building underway since the 2016 election, and expanded during in 2020 and 2024, is creating the trust required for Elections Saskatchewan to be welcomed throughout the province.

And yet, there is a feeling among First Nations electors that more can continue to be done. Respondents to the survey of voters were asked whether Elections Saskatchewan put too much, too little, or just the right amount of energy into a number of focus areas, some of which relate to First Nations. When asked whether

Elections Saskatchewan placed too much, too little, or just the right amount of focus on hiring Indigenous people to work at elections, 41.1 percent of Indigenous respondents said there was too little focus, compared to 13.1 percent of non-Indigenous respondents. Similarly, 38.4 percent of Indigenous respondents (compared to 23.4 percent of non-Indigenous respondents) said Elections Saskatchewan places too little emphasis on encouraging Indigenous people to vote. When asked about Elections Saskatchewan's emphasis on having enough voting places on First Nations' land, 43.9 percent of Indigenous respondents said too little is done, compared to 10.0 percent of non-Indigenous respondents. Thus, while much has been done to foster a strong positive relationship between Elections Saskatchewan and First Nations leadership and communities, there is more work ahead.

While there is certainly room to grow, survey data also reveal the positive effect of Elections Saskatchewan's efforts to better serve Indigenous voters. When asked whether they were satisfied with their voting experience, 96.8 percent of Indigenous voters said they were satisfied, on par with non-Indigenous voters (96.6 percent satisfied) and slightly higher than the 94.5 percent of all voters in 2020. When asked whether they would describe their voting experience as easy, 95.8 percent of Indigenous voters said that it was, closely following 97.4 percent of non-Indigenous voters. When asked whether they were satisfied with the voting opportunities available in the 2024 election, 93.9 percent of Indigenous voters said they were satisfied, on par with 93.6 percent of non-Indigenous voters. Thus, Indigenous voters demonstrate a high level of satisfaction with the voting experience that parallels satisfaction levels in non-Indigenous voters.

Looking ahead, Elections Saskatchewan will build upon these positive assessments while continuing to expand its relationships with Indigenous communities. This includes strengthening collaboration with the leadership in First Nations communities, formulating a strategy for enhancing the relationship between Elections Saskatchewan and the Métis community (particularly with Métis Nation – Saskatchewan), and developing a strategy for engagement with the First Nations community living off First Nations' land. The goal has been and will remain the removal of barriers to participation in elections among people in the Indigenous communities of Saskatchewan.

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Technology Constituencies

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Non-Technology Constituencies

4

CHAPTER FOUR

The Election Period

The election period for Saskatchewan's 30th General Election began when the writs were issued on October 1, 2024, and ended with completion of the Final Count on November 9, 2024, 12 days after the last day of voting. The election period marks an intensive phase for an election management body, characterized by increased operational demands and public engagement. It also presents a valuable opportunity to gain insights through systematic analysis and reflection. The following chapter outlines the events of the election period and highlights key findings drawn from administrative data, surveys, and direct observation.

Technology and Non-Technology Constituencies

For the first time, Elections Saskatchewan adopted two distinct models for administering voting in different constituencies. In slightly over half the constituencies (34 of 61), election officials used laptop computers to strike off voters at the voting location. Once struck off in this way, the province-wide voters list was adjusted to indicate that this voter had voted. This real-time process resulted in a number of administrative improvements, such as making the strike-off process faster for voters, making it simpler and more efficient for poll workers, and providing more timely information on who had voted so parties and candidates could more effectively manage their get-out-the-vote efforts.

The 34 constituencies chosen for this administrative procedure ("technology constituencies") were principally in the urban centres of the province and included constituencies in Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Moose

Jaw, Swift Current, The Battlefords, and Yorkton, plus the constituency of Martensville-Blairmore that is adjacent to Saskatoon. Each of these 34 constituencies had good and reliable internet services that enabled high-speed connectivity between the voting locations and Elections Saskatchewan's servers. Further, the population density of these constituencies allowed Elections Saskatchewan to consolidate voting places to between three and six locations, thereby reducing the staffing complement while maintaining high levels of service.

The other 27 constituencies ("non-technology constituencies"), which have more dispersed populations, administered strike-off using a paper-based method. In these constituencies, voters were struck off the voting record manually at the voting location. Following the close of voting on each of the five days of early voting, Returning Officers used an app to update SEMS with strike-off data for each location.

	Technology Constituency	Non-Technology Constituency
Constituencies	34 constituencies including those in Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Moose Jaw, Yorkton, Swift Current, plus The Battlefords and Martensville-Blairmore	27 constituencies, principally rural
Voting Places Per Constituency	Generally between three and six voting places in a constituency during all six days of voting	Typically between four and eight voting places in a constituency during the first five days of voting, and upwards of 20 voting places on the last day of voting
Method of Voter Strike-Off	Electronically, via laptop computers in the voting place	Manually, via paper-based voting record

Political Parties and Candidates

Elections Saskatchewan provides registered political parties and candidates with a wide range of support materials. These include manuals and guides, forms for candidate nominations and financial disclosures, copies of the voters list, maps to be used for electoral purposes, street indexes, and community name guides. Information and materials such as bulletins are also provided to help ensure compliance with the requirements of *The Election Act, 1996* (the "Act").

Among the most critical support provided to political parties and candidates is an update during the voting period on who has voted. While this information is gathered by Elections Saskatchewan as a means of safeguarding the integrity of the ballot, it is also key to parties and candidates as it facilitates their get-out-the-vote efforts. Knowing who has already voted enables parties and candidates to focus their efforts on supporters who have not yet voted.

Prior to the 2020 election, parties and candidates were provided information on who has voted in two ways. During advance voting, candidate representatives could observe voting and record voter's names, or they could get a copy of the advance poll book at the end of advance voting. Then, on Election Day, candidate representatives could visit voting locations to pick up copies of information forms ("bingo sheets") that provided the voters list sequence number for each voter who cast a ballot. For the parties, working with these information sources was a labour-intensive (and largely volunteer-driven) activity.

In 2020, this system changed for advance voting, largely because the anticipated increase in advance voting turnout would have made the previous system of nightly strike-off unsustainable. In addition, COVID-19 restrictions limited the presence of candidate representatives in the polls and thereby limited the availability of strike-off data for parties and candidates. Under the revised process, DROs provided poll books to the returning office at the close of each day of advance voting. These were scanned and sent to head office, where a team struck voters off electronically. Elections Saskatchewan created a portal where political parties and candidates could download this information on a regular basis.

As part of Elections Saskatchewan's modernization initiative for the 30th General Election, DROs used laptop computers to digitally strike off voters in the technology constituencies both during early voting and on the last day of voting. The strike-off data was uploaded at regular intervals (about every 15 minutes), providing parties and candidates with real-time access to those who had voted.

In the non-technology constituencies, during early voting the strike-off data was entered into the Saskatchewan Election Management System (SEMS) after each day of voting, and parties and candidates received daily updates through the portal, based on the previous day's activities. During the last day of voting, the DROs used the traditional bingo sheet method for providing strike-off data to parties and candidates. For those who voted by mail, strike-off data was entered once a ballot package was issued. Parties and candidates had access to this information through the portal in real time.

Throughout the election cycle, Elections Saskatchewan maintains close contact with the political parties through ongoing informal communications, a Registered Political Party Annual Meeting, and a system of communiques in the period leading up to and including the writ period. As of May 14, 2025, the Chief Electoral Officer issued 48 communiques to the parties containing information and instructions for the 30th General Election, slightly fewer than the 61 communiques issued for the 29th General Election.

At the close of nominations on October 12, 2024, 243 candidates were nominated, seven more than the 236 candidates in 2020 and 25 fewer than the record number of 268 candidates in 2016. 241 of the candidates represented one of the seven registered parties, and two were independent.

Findings
Several Chief Official Agents for the parties and party leaders were interviewed as part of the information and data gathering efforts for this project.

Overall, the Chief Official Agents and party leaders were complimentary of Elections Saskatchewan's performance in preparation for and during the election. The increased training provided to candidates' Financial Agents was identified as particularly helpful. They also appreciated the introduction of a seamless Voting Week instead of distinct advance and Election Day voting. Finally, there was a positive assessment of the use of electronic poll books. Chief Official Agents suggested that the use of electronic poll books be continued and even expanded in future elections.

One interview raised a concern about a perceived delay in results reporting caused by the counting of Vote by Mail ballots during the Second Preliminary Count, two days after the First Preliminary Count. It was suggested that these mail-in ballots should be moved from the second to the First Preliminary Count. In fact, the Second Preliminary Count enables Elections Saskatchewan to count mail-in ballots earlier than would otherwise be the case. Previously, mail-in ballots were only addressed during the Final Count. The two-day timeline after the last day of voting was implemented not to delay the counting of mail-in ballots but to allow Elections Saskatchewan to maximize the number of these ballots that can be counted early.

> Chief Official Agents suggested that the use of electronic poll books be continued and even expanded in future elections.

The party officials had generally positive experiences in their interactions with Elections Saskatchewan personnel. They shared the perception that Elections Saskatchewan communicates effectively with party officials, provides useful and comprehensive guides for various roles, and is responsive to questions and comments, particularly during times of high activity in the election period. Further, 81.7 percent of Financial Agents were satisfied with their interactions with Elections Saskatchewan regarding electoral finance.

Participants identified some opportunities for improvement. Many party officials were complimentary on the use of technology in the voting place, particularly with the use of laptop computers for the electronic poll books and optical scanners to scan Voter Information Cards (VICs). Generally, they supported expanding the use of this technology to all voting places. Many party officials suggested that a logical extension in the use of e-poll books would be the use of electronic ballot counting machines, and indicated that they supported the use of this technology in future elections. Some also suggested a more flexible approach to the use of other voting procedures. One suggestion was more flexible use of mobile polls. Another was the adoption of a more flexible schedule for some voting places, particularly in remote areas: for example, opening a particular voting place for a more limited number of hours or days.

Oversight of Saskatchewan's political finance regime is an important part of Elections Saskatchewan's mandate. However, as most of its activities occur in the year following the election, a review of that process will be completed after the publication of this volume. The results of that review will be included in Volume III of this Report, *Statement of Expenditures*.

Vote by Mail

Historically, absentee voting was used to ensure that people who were temporarily absent from the province during a general election could vote. Absentee voting could take place in the returning office, with voters able to vote in person at any point between the issuance of the writ of election and the legislated absentee voting deadline, or through the mail. Before 2020, this form of voting was used relatively infrequently. For example, in 2016, only 4,420 (or one percent) of the 434,244 people who voted did so by absentee ballot.

The use of absentee ballots changed considerably for the 2020 election. Administering a general election during a pandemic led to changes designed to ensure that voters and election workers alike could participate safely. The Chief Electoral Officer developed and implemented a strategy focused on encouraging people to use a variety of voting procedures, with the goal of reducing an overwhelming demand on any one approach. This strategy successfully diffused the pressures on the election system. Of 445,011 ballots cast in the 2020 election, only 45 percent were cast on Election Day, compared to 73 percent in 2016. This was by far the lowest number recorded in the province's history.

Method of Voting

An expansion in the use of mail-in ballots was always a part of the recommendations for legislative reform put forth by the Chief Electoral Officer after the 29th General Election in 2016. Volume IV of the report on that election presented a three-stage modernization plan involving the gradual implementation of ballot tabulators and electronic poll books over the course of three elections. As part of that plan, the Chief Electoral Officer wrote: "Because voting locations must serve the population of geographically large areas in remote and lightly populated rural areas of the province, it is suggested that voters in these areas be able to vote with newly defined postal voting provisions."[1] However, when the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 led to discussions on how best to prepare for an election in a pandemic environment, the Chief Electoral Officer elected to move this aspect of modernization forward and implement it on a much wider scale.

To design, manage, and implement a process that could handle such a large increase in mail-in ballots, Elections Saskatchewan established a Vote by Mail team that operated throughout the election period. This team was responsible for processing Vote by Mail ballot requests, most of which arrived through an online portal designed for this purpose, with a smaller number being received on a paper form. If the request was approved by Elections Saskatchewan officials, a ballot package was mailed and the voter was struck off the voters list. Once the completed ballot package was received from the voter, the certificate envelope was reviewed for compliance with integrity requirements (including that it was signed by the voter who was issued the package). If the certificate envelope was accepted, the secrecy envelope was removed, and the ballot (while still inside the secrecy envelope) was placed into a ballot box for the appropriate constituency. This was done by the staff involved in the adjudication process, and registered political parties were invited to observe. The final step was the counting of ballots, which was done in two stages: the first during the Second Preliminary Count, and the remainder during the Final Count. Procedures developed in advance of the 2020 election were largely continued for the 2024 election.

The accompanying chart illustrates the dramatic changes in methods of voting between 2016 and 2020, and the
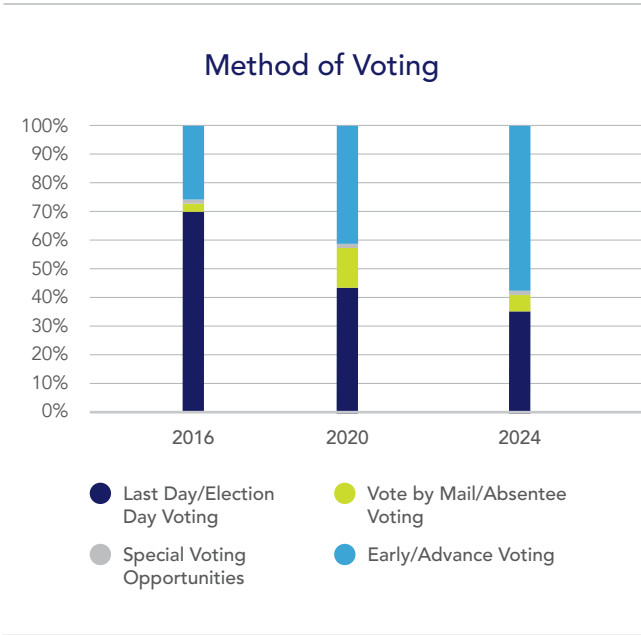
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[1] *A Report on the Twenty-Eighth General Election, Volume IV: Chief Electoral Officer's Recommendations for Legislative Reform*, p.36. This change was initially proposed to take place in 2024 for the province's 30th General Election.

persistence of the changes in 2024. Vote by Mail increased over ten-fold from 2016 to 2020, growing from 4,420 and one percent of voters using this method in 2016, to 54,626 and 12.4 percent of voters using this method in 2020. There was some uncertainty about whether the growth in popularity of Vote by Mail would persist beyond the pandemic election in 2020, but the 2024 election demonstrated the continuing demand for this voting option. Although the number of voters using Vote by Mail declined from the numbers reached in 2020, it has remained an important voting option, used by 25,921 voters in 2024, for a total of 5.6 percent of all votes. The popularity and widespread availability of Vote by Mail has enabled Elections Saskatchewan to eliminate other forms of absentee voting, such as voting in the returning office. This ensures accessibility while increasing efficiency for voters and election workers alike.

The accompanying chart also illustrates other long-term trends in voting methods. The 2020 election saw a dramatic increase in voting during the period referred to at the time as advance voting, i.e., the five days of voting that occurred prior to the last day of voting (referred to at that time as Election Day). The percentage of votes cast in advance grew from 25.6 percent in 2016 to 41.7 percent in 2020. This growth in advance voting was anticipated and encouraged by Elections Saskatchewan as a way of reducing the likelihood that there would be large gatherings of people during voting in a pandemic. However, the change has persisted beyond the pandemic, as the portion of votes cast during the five-day period before the last day of voting (now called "early voting"), rose to 58.4 percent. Likewise, the overall decline in voting during the last day of voting has persisted, as 35.7 percent of votes were cast on the last day of voting in 2024, compared to 73 percent in 2016 and 45.2 percent in 2020.

Findings
An assessor engaged for this review was present to act as an external observer during the processes of envelope receipt, certificate envelope adjudication, and ballot counting. The processing of Vote by Mail ballots was conducted at a secure site in Regina by staff dedicated to this method of voting. Requests for Vote by Mail packages were received by Elections Saskatchewan from June 5 until October 19. During that period, over 32,000 requests for Vote by Mail packages were received. Once approved by Elections Saskatchewan staff, the Vote by Mail package was sent to

the voter. The first Vote by Mail kits were mailed on October 2, one day after the writs of election were signed on October 1. Under the Act, returned Vote by Mail packages must be post-marked by the last day of voting, October 28, to be counted. For the 2024 election, the voter was struck off the voters list at the time the Vote by Mail package was mailed out as required by legislation. However, voters who receive a Vote by Mail package could still decide to vote in person either during early voting or on the last day of voting.

Regarding the processing of Vote by Mail packages, the following procedures were used once Canada Post delivered completed ballot packages:

An Elections Saskatchewan team opened the returned packages, removed the certificate envelopes, and then placed those in the appropriate constituency bin.

Another team scanned each envelope one constituency at a time, marking the certificate envelope into the tracking system as received.

At adjudication, certificate envelopes were reviewed to ensure that the name and date of birth was correct and that the envelope had been signed by the voter.

Once a certificate envelope passed adjudication, it was opened, and the sealed secrecy envelope was removed and placed into the constituency's ballot box where it was combined with others from the same constituency to ensure voter confidentiality.

Ballot boxes containing Vote by Mail ballots received by October 26 were opened and counted during the Second Preliminary Count on October 30. Ballot boxes containing Vote by Mail ballots received between October 27 and November 7 but postmarked no later than the last day of voting (October 28) were opened and counted during the Final Count on November 7.

In discussions with party leaders and Chief Official Agents, the parties indicated their overall satisfaction with the way that Vote by Mail was administered in 2024. Although there was a modest decline in Vote by Mail usage in 2024, it is clear this has become the preferred method of voting for some electors. In the words of one interviewee, "people who vote by mail tend to keep voting by mail."

The survey of voters indicates some differences among age groups in voters' preferences for voting alternatives. Younger voters (under 30) were most likely to indicate that they voted on the last day of voting (41 percent), compared to only 31 percent of those over 60 years old. Voters over 60 were more likely to vote during the period of early voting (52 percent), compared to only 40 percent of young voters. The figure below shows that while there were minimal differences in the Vote by Mail rates among age groups below 59 years of age, the percentage of voters who chose to Vote by Mail increases in older age categories.

Data from the survey of voters in 2024 reveal both an appreciation for Vote by Mail and some reservation about its use in Saskatchewan elections. Most voters like the contribution of Vote by Mail to greater accessibility of the ballot. For example, 85.9 percent said that Vote by Mail provides greater access to voting for all voters in Saskatchewan. Further, although Vote by Mail ballots are counted later than those cast in person during early voting and on the last day of voting, three-quarters of respondents said the delays caused by counting Vote by Mail ballots are reasonable and necessary. While many held these positive views of Vote by Mail, just over half of respondents (55.8 percent) said Vote by Mail may have led to increased voter fraud, and about half (50.2 percent) said that Vote by Mail added unnecessary confusion to the Saskatchewan election. Notwithstanding these concerns, over seven in 10 respondents (71.7 percent) said Vote by Mail should be used more in future elections.

These numbers point to Elections Saskatchewan's primary responsibility to ensure the integrity of election results and maintain public confidence in the voting process. Rigorous procedures have been put in place to ensure the integrity of Vote by Mail – and absentee voting more generally – as well as to ensure that these processes do not compromise public faith in the integrity of elections. To the extent that the recent increases in absentee voting may persist or even increase in future, it is particularly important that Elections

Voting Method by Age Category (Percentage of Vote)
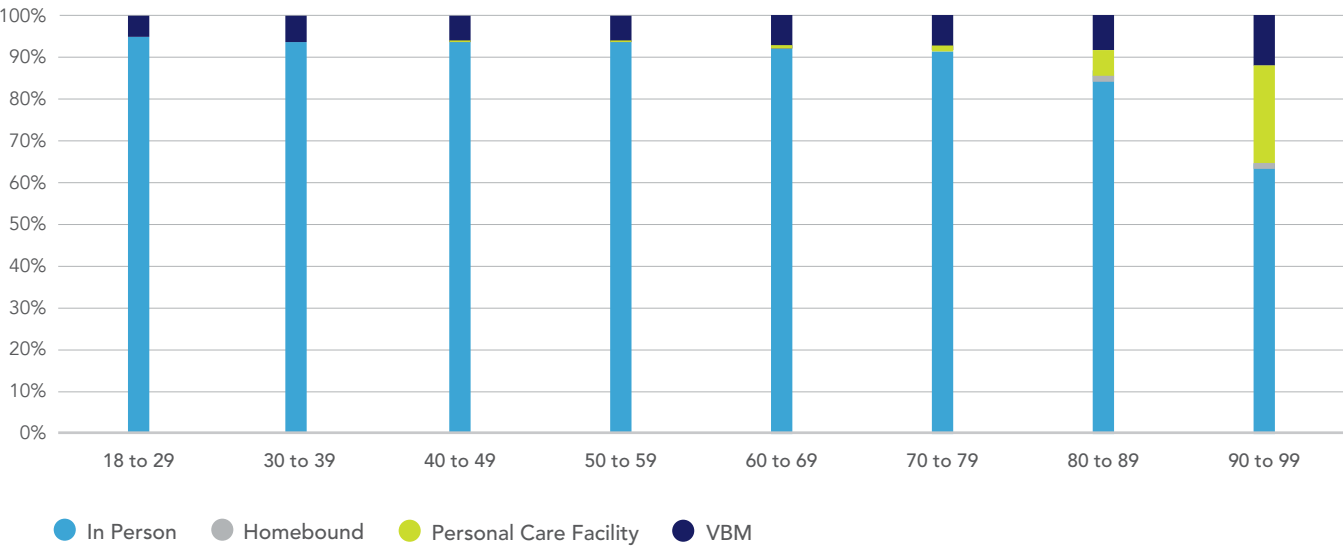
Legend: In Person (blue) · Homebound (grey) · Personal Care Facility (green) · VBM (dark blue)

> There has been a dramatic increase in the use of early voting in Saskatchewan's general elections.

Saskatchewan communicate with voters and other electoral stakeholders about the many safeguards that maintain election integrity throughout the use of these processes.

Voting Week

Although the percentage of the eligible electorate who vote has been declining over time in Saskatchewan and elsewhere, the 2024 election saw an increase.

Eligible Voter Turnout

	2016	2020	2024
	53.28%	52.86%	56.76%
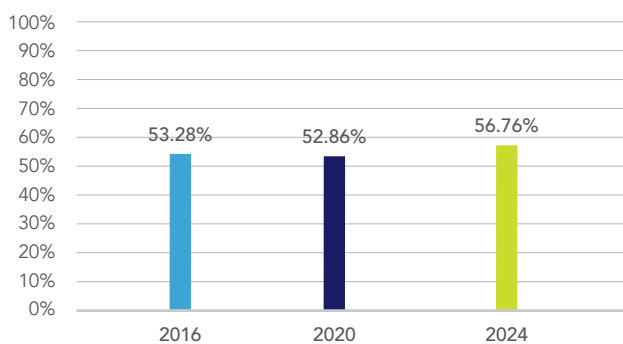
However, these changes in the number of eligible voters casting a ballot have occurred during a time of dramatic changes in how people vote in Saskatchewan elections. As was shown previously in this chapter, voting in advance voting locations (now known as early voting) increased from about one-quarter of all votes in 2016 to just over 58 percent in 2024. By comparison, at the beginning of the 2000s, typically fewer than about five percent of votes were cast in advance of Election Day. Today, voting in early voting opportunities has become the method of choice for many voters. In contrast, voting on Election Day (now known as the last day of voting), has declined sharply as a percentage of all votes cast. Whereas in 2016 about three-quarters of votes were cast on Election Day, fewer than half of voters in 2020 and just over 35 percent 2024 voted on the last day of voting.
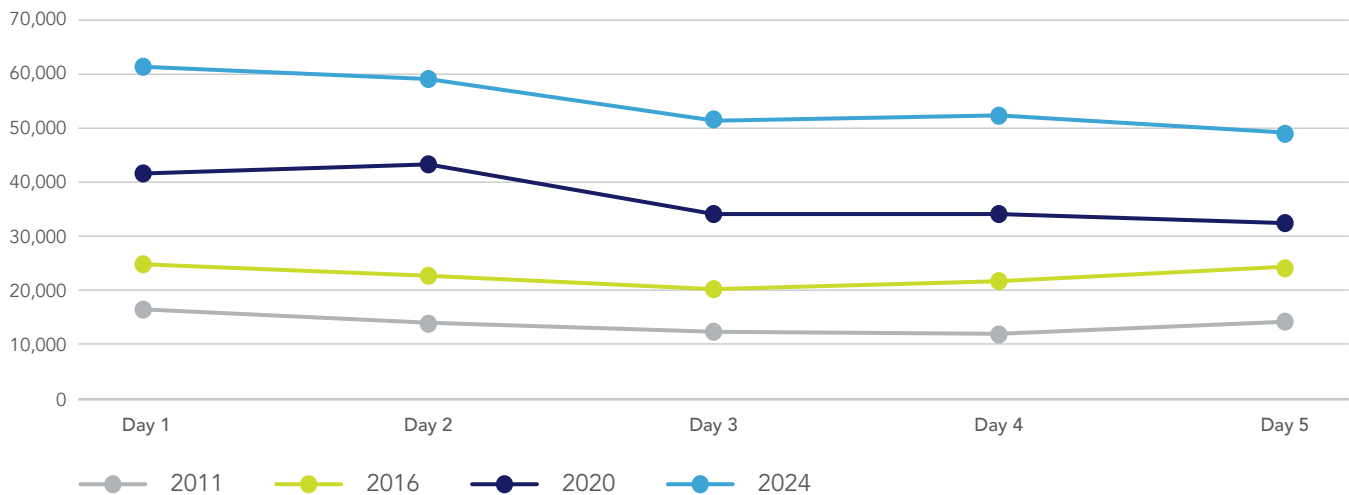
Early Voting

There has been a dramatic increase in the use of early voting in Saskatchewan's general elections in recent years. For the 30th General Election, early voting ran from October 22 to 26, with all early voting locations open from 10 a.m. until 7 p.m. on each day, an increase of one hour per day from 2020. To service the community, a total of 303 early voting locations were used, up from 243 for the 2020 election and 173 for the 2016 election. This represents a significant increase of 25 percent since 2020 and of 75 percent since 2016.

The 2016 election in Saskatchewan was the first in which advance voting was available to all voters, without requiring the voter to provide a specific and legislatively defined reason to vote in advance. In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Elections Saskatchewan took this one step farther: due to the need to avoid crowding at Election Day voting locations, Elections Saskatchewan adopted a strategy of actively encouraging voters to consider voting opportunities other than Election Day. Communications highlighted the convenience and increased physical distancing afforded to those voting in advance.

In 2024, Elections Saskatchewan further adapted its messaging, emphasizing the full six-day Voting Week composed of five days of early voting along with the last day of voting. This messaging eliminated the differentiation between advance voting and Election Day voting, promoting a more seamless and undifferentiated Voting Week. The change also emphasized that choosing what day to vote was simply a matter of personal preference. As one would expect, the normalization of early voting in Saskatchewan elections resulted in a further shift in favour of early voting. The change has been striking. Whereas 25.6 percent of votes in 2016 were cast in advance polls, this increased to 41.7 percent of votes in 2020, and to almost six in 10 votes (58.3 percent) during early voting in 2024.

This dramatic increase in early voting can be seen in the following table that shows the number of votes cast during each day of early (advance) voting from 2011 to 2024. During the 2024 election, between 49,000 and 61,000 people voted during each day of early voting, an increase of almost 20,000 votes per day compared to 2020, when early voting ranged from 31,000 to 43,000 votes each day.

Early Voting/Advance Voting Turnout by Day 2011 to 2024

Findings on Early Voting

The movement toward a unified Voting Week appears to have been very well received by voters and election workers alike. Respondents to the survey of voters and non-voters said overwhelmingly that it was easy to get information on the different ways to vote (88.8 percent agreed), that they were knowledgeable about different ways to vote (87.4 percent agreed), and that they were knowledgeable about voting in person at an early date (86.3 percent agreed). Furthermore, 96.6 percent of voters said they were satisfied with their voting experience and 96.7 percent characterized voting in the election as easy. When asked specifically about whether the change to Voting Week was a good or bad thing, most respondents said it was a good thing.

Election workers have direct insight into how changes in the voting process affect the way the election is administered on the ground, as well as the effect of these changes on voters. The survey of election workers indicates a high level of satisfaction with the administrative changes involved

> ## 96.6 percent of voters said they were satisfied with their voting experience.

in the transition to a Voting Week. When asked about their satisfaction with wait times during the five days of early voting, almost all election workers in both the technology and non-technology constituencies said they were satisfied (98.5 percent in the technology constituencies and 96.6 percent in the non-technology constituencies). Likewise, over nine in 10 election workers in both constituency types said they were satisfied with the accessibility of the voting places (92.8 percent in technology constituencies and 94.9 percent in non-technology constituencies).

While some election workers reported short lineups, in most cases the lineups were observed during the first day of early voting. Interestingly, when asked what they thought accounted for lineups during early voting, the same two reasons emerged in both types of constituencies: namely, that voters were lined up before voting locations opened, and that lineups were caused by voters needing to have their registration changed. In both instances, such reasons for lineups are unavoidable. Notwithstanding their experience with some lineups during the period of early voting, election workers indicated overwhelming satisfaction with the voting process. Asked whether they were satisfied with the voting process, almost none (1.4 percent in technology constituencies and 2.7 percent in non-technology constituencies) said they were dissatisfied.

Elections Saskatchewan's report on the 2020 election noted the continued growth in the popularity of early voting among the Saskatchewan electorate and suggested the time had come to consider simplifying voting alternatives and introducing the idea of a Voting Week. Subsequent changes to the Act have enabled introduction of the concept of a Voting Week. The data from 2024 indicate that the change has been an overwhelming success and should be continued for future provincial elections.

The Last Day of Voting

The last day of voting for the 30th General Election was held on October 28, 2024. A total of 2,794 voting locations were established, with voting from 9:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. Between 2016 and 2024, the percentage of voters who cast a ballot on the last day of voting declined from 73 percent to 35.7 percent. In 2016, a total of 315,990 votes were cast on Election Day, while in 2024, only 166,835 votes were cast on the last day of voting.

Due to the emphasis on a unified Voting Week in the 2024 election, October 28 was no longer described as Election Day, as in past elections; it was simply called the last day of voting. This represented a subtle but important change in messaging – why wait until the last day to vote, when you can vote early? The change has been transformational for election administration. Whereas in 2016 about three times as many people voted on the last day of voting compared to early voting, in 2024 early voters outnumbered those voting on the last day by a ratio of about three to two (58.4 percent versus 35.7 percent). This change enabled Elections Saskatchewan to serve the voting public much more efficiently, with fewer voting locations, fewer staff, and no notable increase in lineups. It reflects a win-win-win scenario for voters, parties and candidates, and Elections Saskatchewan. Voters have more options to vote at a time and place that aligns with their schedule, parties and candidates get information on who voted in early voting opportunities so that they can focus their get-out-the-vote efforts on the smaller number of supporters who have yet to vote, and Elections Saskatchewan is able to conduct its operations more efficiently and effectively with fewer staff.

Findings on the Last Day of Voting

Efforts to broaden access to voting have been well-received by voters and election workers alike. Respondents to the survey of voters were asked how long their total voting

94.5 percent of those who voted on the last day of voting said they were satisfied with the length of time it took to vote.

experience lasted, from the time they arrived at the voting place until they left. Forty percent said they were there for less than five minutes, and the same percentage (40 percent) said they were there between five and 10 minutes. Finally, 94.5 percent of those who voted on the last day of voting said they were satisfied with the length of time it took to vote.

Findings on Both Early Voting and the Last Day of Voting

Rigorous compliance with the administrative requirements of the Act is critical to ensure a high level of trust in both the administration and the outcome of provincial elections. To help assess compliance with the rules and procedures established in accordance with the Act, a team of 12 observers conducted observations at voting locations both during early voting and on the last day of voting. Although the observers conducted observations only in a limited number of voting locations, this sample of six rural constituencies and six urban constituencies sheds light on how well election workers comply with election administration protocols.

For example, legislation requires that voters produce identification documents in order to receive a ballot. Observers confirmed that 100 percent of those who were issued a ballot satisfied the Act's voter ID requirement. Of those who presented themselves to the DRO, 99.2 percent during early voting and 98.7 percent on the last day of voting were issued a ballot. Those who were not issued a ballot were typically denied because they were at the wrong voting place, in which case they were provided with the correct information and sent to their proper voting location.

When ballots are issued, election officials are required to strike off the voter from the voter's list and remove the counter-foil from the ballot. The observers confirmed compliance 100 percent of the time both in early voting and on the last day of voting. After marking the ballot, the ballot must be deposited in the ballot box, usually by the voter,

Some election workers said the job was too demanding, and others said the hours of work were too long.

but occasionally by the DRO (at the voter's discretion). Here again, compliance was observed in 100 percent of the cases.

While compliance with the Act is critical, it is also important that election workers not be overly officious, instead bringing a service-oriented mindset to their work. Evidence from the voters' survey suggests that the 2024 election achieved a healthy balance between these principles. On the one hand, there were very high levels of voter satisfaction regarding their interactions with election workers. 96 percent of voters indicated they were either satisfied with election workers, or had no opinion one way or another, while only 3.9 percent indicated some level of dissatisfaction. As for belief in the integrity of the election, 96 percent of voters believe their ballot was counted, and a similar percentage said they were satisfied that they were able to vote in private. A somewhat smaller percentage, but still almost nine in 10 voters (87.3 percent) were confident that only those eligible to vote were allowed to cast a ballot in the election.

Confidence in the integrity of the election was shared by election workers. When asked in the survey whether they believed the election was run fairly, 99 percent of election workers in the technology constituencies and 98 percent in the non-technology constituencies either agreed that it was run fairly or were neutral and had no view on the matter.

This is not to suggest that there were no perceived problems with the election. Some election workers said the job was too demanding, and others said the hours of work were too long. Only about three in four election workers said the hours were reasonable, and only seven in 10 said the pay was good. About three-quarters said they were already tired when the time came to start counting votes, and said the workday was too long on the last day of voting. Some mentioned the amount of paperwork required, and some in the non-technology constituencies were displeased

with the amount of writing required. Notwithstanding these challenges, though, both voters and election workers viewed the outcome of the election as having a high level of integrity. Interviews with senior party officials revealed that this perspective was shared among the parties and candidates as well.

Making voting easy and convenient for voters is a high priority for election management bodies. One of the principal benefits of the voting system used in Saskatchewan elections is that the Voting Week ballot is easy to understand and simple to use. The voter simply marks an X next to the candidate they prefer, and the candidate with the most votes wins. Coupled with the idea that voting should be easy is the idea, which has gained prominence over the last few decades, that voters should be able to vote at times and in places that are convenient for them. The broader acceptance of these principles has led to a loosening of restrictions on early voting and absentee voting in many jurisdictions, including Saskatchewan. The 2024 election shows that voters appreciate these changes.

Among the elements that contribute to the ease and convenience of voting are how far voters must travel to get to the voting location and how long it takes to cast a ballot. In view of the significant increase in the number of people who voted during early voting and the decrease in the number who voted on the last day of voting, it is timely to compare the distances and times involved, as well as the degree of satisfaction with these elements. The 2024 election featured significant changes in the technology constituencies, including introduction of technology in the form of laptop computers for voter strike-off, a redesign in the configuration of voting locations, elimination of the poll clerk, creation of the Ballot Box Officer, and use of the same voting locations during all six days of voting. These combined changes also resulted in a significant reduction in voting places in technology constituencies, all of which were located in urban settings. In contrast, non-technology constituencies, which included most of Saskatchewan's rural areas, saw fewer changes. Voter strike-off remained a paper-based process and the last day of voting featured no significant reduction in the number of polling locations compared to Election Day in 2020.

Data from the voter survey sheds light on the distance travelled and time required for voting. When asked how far they travelled to vote, people who voted on the last day

of voting responded similarly to those who voted during early voting. Almost half (48.8 percent) of all voters who voted in person, whether during early voting or on the last day of voting, said they travelled one kilometre or less to vote. A further four in 10 (38.5 percent) said they travelled between one and five kilometres. Thus almost nine in 10 voters (87.3 percent) travelled five kilometres or less to vote. Another 7.4 percent said they travelled between five and 10 kilometres to vote, resulting in 95 percent of voters travelling 10 kilometres or less to vote. When asked about their satisfaction with the distance they had to travel to vote, 94.1 percent of those who voted during early voting, and 95.2 percent who voted on the last day of voting, said they were satisfied. In both instances, this was similar to the satisfaction expressed by voters in 2020.

The amount of time it took to vote was assessed through two methods: direct observation and asking voters about their voting experience. Observers were asked to record the timing of three separate activities: the time from a person's arrival at the voting location until they were greeted by the Information Officer, the time from when they left the Information Officer until they were greeted by the DRO or poll clerk, and the time from when they were issued a ballot until the ballot was deposited into the ballot box.

Voters presenting themselves at the voting location typically had very little wait time before they were greeted by the Information Officer. In the technology constituencies, voters waited on average six seconds during early voting and four seconds on the last day of voting to be greeted by the Information Officer. In non-technology constituencies the times were 14 seconds in early voting and 10 seconds on the last day of voting. When measuring how long it took for voters to be greeted by the DRO, in technology constituencies the averages were 18 seconds during early voting and 31 seconds on the last day of voting; in the non-technology constituencies, the averages were 48 seconds for early voting and one minute and 10 seconds on the last day of voting. The average time from receiving the ballot to depositing it in the ballot box was less than one minute in all instances. In the technology constituencies it was 52 seconds during early voting and 50 seconds on the last day of voting, and in the non-technology constituencies it was 41 seconds during early voting and 43 seconds on the last day of voting.

Voters were asked to estimate the total time involved in voting, from when they arrived at the voting place until they were finished voting. Slightly more than eight in 10 voters (80.9 percent) said the voting experience took 10 minutes or less, and 95.2 percent said it took 20 minutes or less. When asked how long it took to vote in 2024 compared to previous elections, about half (49.3 percent) said it took about the same amount of time, about a third (31.8 percent) said it was shorter than in previous elections, and about

one in six (16.8 percent) said voting took longer in 2024. Satisfaction with the time needed to vote was very high: 94 percent of voters said they were satisfied with how long it took to vote, a finding very similar to the 2020 election. Furthermore, there was virtually no difference in satisfaction between those who voted during the period of early voting and those who opted for the last day of voting.

In sum, although there were significant shifts in voter behaviour during the 2024 election, satisfaction with the voting experience – including distance travelled to vote and time taken to vote – remained very high among both those who engaged in early voting and those who voted on the last day.

Saskatchewan's 30th General Election ushered in several process improvements facilitated by a combination of administrative changes and updates to the Act. The most striking changes in the 2024 election were the introduction of electronic poll books in urban constituencies, the elimination of the poll clerk position and introduction of the Ballot Box Officer in these same constituencies, the adoption of a seamless Voting Week in lieu of a period of advance voting followed by Election Day, and greater flexibility in the use of staffing. An example of this increased flexibility was the deployment of ballot counting teams to assist in locations with a high number of ballots.

Technology constituencies reduced the total number of voting places required, while still providing a high level of service. In all constituencies, voter behaviour shifted toward use of the full Voting Week, embracing early voting and reducing voting on the last day. In contrast to 2016, with its three-to-one preference for Election Day versus advance voting, and 2020, featuring an even split, voters in 2024 preferred early voting over the last day of voting by a ratio of about three to two. Surveys found that satisfaction with the voting experience remained high with this shift in behaviour. Therefore, the change to the undifferentiated process known as Voting Week has been judged to be a success by voters, election stakeholders, and Elections Saskatchewan, and should be continued for future elections.

Important technology improvements were introduced into the voting experience in 2024, mainly in urban constituencies. The introduction of electronic poll books, put on hold in 2020, proved very successful in both

Elections Saskatchewan's August 2023 by-elections and in the 30th General Election. Electronic poll books eliminate the need to write the name of each voter into the poll book; instead, they are simply struck off electronically when they vote. This process contributes to enhanced election integrity while also enabling Elections Saskatchewan to provide political parties and candidates near-real-time information on who has voted, assisting with voter mobilization efforts. It also enables and facilitates important administrative changes, such as rationalizing the staffing at voting locations (including eliminating the poll clerk position) and reducing the number of voting locations needed to service some communities. The success of these changes in urban constituencies suggests that Elections Saskatchewan should prioritize further exploration of opportunities to extend these improvements to rural constituencies in advance of the 2028 election.

Voting by Special Ballot

Special ballots provide additional support for voters who are unable to cast a ballot using other voting arrangements. In the 30th General Election, Special Voting options included homebound voting, personal care facility voting, and voting in hospitals and remand centres. Although legislation provides for temporarily displaced polls in the event of floods, fire, or other natural disasters, there was happily no need for such polls in 2024.

Special Voting

Homebound 5%

Hospitals, Remand, and Temporary Displaced 17%

Personal Care Facilities 78%
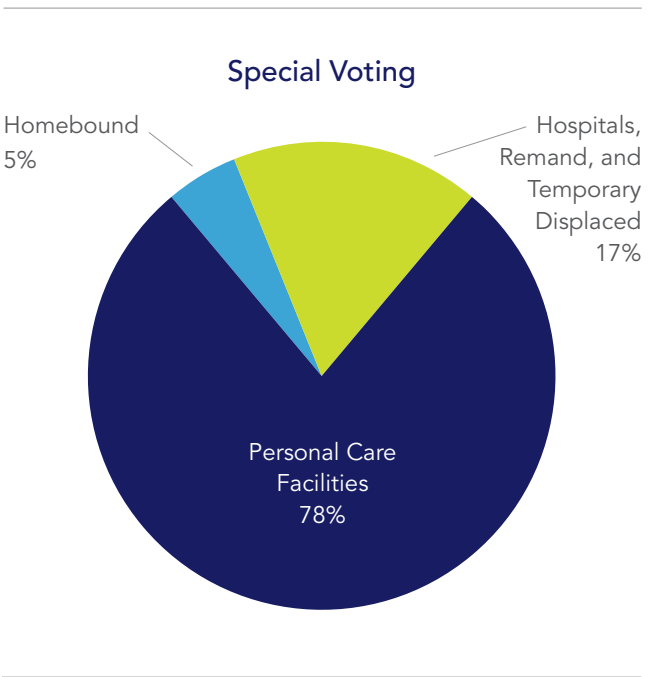
A total of 7,295 special ballots were cast in 2024 (including rejected ballots), comprising 1.5 percent of all votes cast in the election. This was a substantial increase from the 3,273 special ballots cast in 2020. The use of special ballots ranged from a low of 13 in Regina Northeast and 37 in Regina Wascana Plains to highs of 333 in Prince Albert Northcote and 370 in Saskatoon Stonebridge.

Elections Saskatchewan provided the vote to over 5,000 residents of personal care facilities throughout the province. Through this special voting method, election officials visit personal care facilities to administer voting to residents, often at voters' bedsides. This has become a common administrative procedure among election administration agencies and is consistent with the principle of supporting ease of access. Without the use of special voting procedures, many eligible voters at personal care facilities would in effect be administratively disenfranchised.

Elections Saskatchewan also administered voting to 382 residents in their homes through homebound voting. This number includes both the traditional homebound voting, where a team of election officials visits a voter in their home, and the use of "homebound mobile polls," where a team visits independent living facilities and administers the vote for a number of residents in one visit.

Findings
The Act's special voting provisions play a critical role for the voters of Saskatchewan. Special ballots – i.e., hospital, remand, and temporarily displaced voting; homebound and mobile homebound voting; and personal care facility voting – combine to provide a suite of options for older voters, voters with disabilities, and voters with mobility issues.

Even with special voting provisions, meeting the needs of all voters remains a challenge. During the 30th General Election, some seniors living in independent living facilities raised concerns regarding their particular mobility challenges. As these facilities do not meet the legal definition of personal care homes, the expectation under the Act is that the voters who live there can access the vote through regular voting locations, Vote by Mail, or homebound voting. However, some of these facilities expressed concerns that their voters may not be able

to access these methods. In response, Elections Saskatchewan established homebound mobile polls in these buildings to facilitate voting for these seniors in their place of residence.

While special voting was ultimately a success in 2024, it is important to note that these methods of voting have remained essentially unchanged for 30 years. The expanded use of Vote by Mail provides an important tool in reducing barriers for voters, but it is unclear whether the provisions of special voting still adequately meet the needs of Saskatchewan's voters. In the past, these provisions were beyond the scope of Elections Saskatchewan's Administrative Reviews; however, the time is ripe for a comprehensive evaluation. That evaluation should take a central role in the Administrative Review of Saskatchewan's 31st General Election in 2028.

Counting and Reporting Election Results
Counting votes in three stages: In Saskatchewan elections up to and including 2016, there were two vote counts. The first occurred on election night and included votes that were cast at each voting location on Election Day and all the votes cast in advance voting. The second count, called the Final Count, occurred about two weeks later and included absentee ballots and ballots cast at remand centres and hospitals.

Beginning in 2020 and continuing in 2024, another count called the Second Preliminary Count was added to elections in Saskatchewan. For the 2024 election, the first count, called the "First Preliminary Count," was conducted on the last day of voting, October 28, and included ballots cast in person at assigned voting places and personal care facilities during all six days of voting. The Second Preliminary Count was then conducted on October 30 and included all mail-in ballots that were returned to Elections Saskatchewan by the end of the early voting period on October 26. The third, called the Final Count, was conducted (as has always been required by legislation) 12 days after the last day of voting on November 9, 2024. The Final Count included Vote by Mail ballots that were postmarked no later than October 28 but were received between October 27 and November 7, as well as remaining special (hospital, remand, or temporarily displaced) ballots.

When ballots will be counted in the 2024 Provincial Election.

- **All ballots are paper and are marked by the voter by hand.**

- **All ballots are counted by hand by election workers. Some workers will have more ballots to count than others, so voting results will not all report at the same time.**

- **There are no electronic ballots, voting machines, or counting machines used in a Saskatchewan provincial election.**
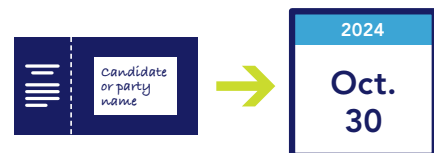
1 First Preliminary Count
October 28 after 8 p.m. (last day of voting)
- Voting Week ballots
- homebound voting ballots
- personal care facility ballots

2024
Oct. 28
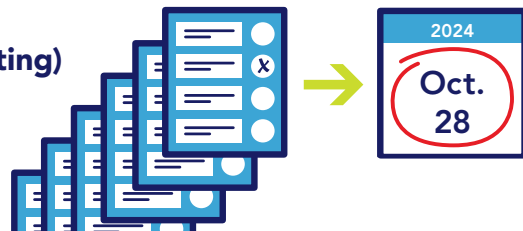
2 Second Preliminary Count
**October 30
(two days after last day of voting)**
- Vote by Mail ballots received by October 26

2024
Oct. 30

3 Final Count
**November 9
(12 days after last day of voting)**
- all ballots from first and second preliminary counts
- Vote by Mail ballots received after October 26
- hospital, remand, and temporarily displaced voter ballots

2024
Nov. 9

Elections SK SK 2024 VOTES
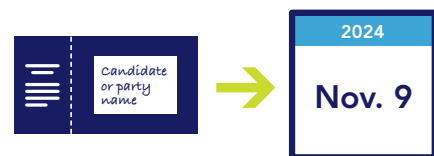
1.877.958.8683 | elections.sk.ca

On the last day of voting, a total of 441,523 ballots were counted, up from 385,057 ballots that were counted on election night in 2020.

First Preliminary Count: After the close of voting on the last day of voting, ballots are counted at the voting location at which they were cast and the results communicated to the returning office. There, the information is entered into Elections Saskatchewan's election reporting system and then communicated publicly. The counting of ballots is an open and transparent process which candidate representatives may observe.

Increases in the use of early voting as well as changes in the staffing at voting stations led to changes in the way votes were counted in 2024. In previous elections, votes were counted by the DRO and the poll clerk who administered voting for each polling station. In 2024, the poll clerk position was eliminated in the technology constituencies for the full Voting Week, and in all early voting locations in non-technology constituencies. A new position, the Ballot Box Officer, was added in these voting locations. In non-technology constituencies, the poll clerk position was retained on the last day of voting, joining with the DRO to count the ballots. In technology constituencies another election official, usually the Ballot Box Officer or an Information Officer, counted with the DRO.

Due to the popularity of early voting, many voting places required more than one ballot box to contain all the ballots cast at the location. Once the number of ballots in a box exceeded about 700, the DRO sealed the box and began using a new ballot box. Observers at voting locations witnessed 100 percent compliance with all procedures for the sealing of ballot boxes and for the opening of new ballot boxes. At the close of voting on the last day of voting, the DRO and their assistant counted the ballots in the box they were currently using, and a team of two ballot counters was deployed to count the ballots for each additional ballot box that had already been used and sealed. This was the approach for all additional ballot boxes used at technology voting locations during the six

days of voting, as well as the ballot boxes used for early voting at non-technology voting locations.

Once ballot counting was completed, the ballot counting teams packaged the ballots, ballot reconciliation materials, and polling station materials into the ballot box, sealed the box, and transported it to the returning office for secure storage. These materials are securely stored for one year in accordance with the Act. As in 2016 and 2020, the observers who oversaw the vote counting and securing of election materials on election night reported complete compliance with administrative procedures.

On the last day of voting, a total of 441,523 ballots were counted, up from 385,057 ballots counted on election night in 2020. Results of the First Preliminary Count were delivered that night on Elections Saskatchewan's website and widely reported in the media.

Second Preliminary Count: Prior to the 2020 election, absentee ballots, which are principally Vote by Mail ballots, were administered through the constituency returning office and counted in the returning office during the Final Count. From the 2020 election onward, however, Vote by Mail ballots have been administered centrally by Elections Saskatchewan's head office. Vote by Mail ballots are counted through a process administered by head office and called the Second Preliminary Count. In 2024, the Second Preliminary Count took place on October 30.

The Second Preliminary Count focuses on absentee (i.e., Vote by Mail) ballots received by October 26, the last day of early voting. The purpose of conducting a Second Preliminary Count of Vote by Mail ballots two days after the First Preliminary Count is to reduce uncertainty in the election outcome, since the relatively large number of Vote by Mail ballots now has the potential to change election outcomes in several constituencies. In total, 20,417 ballots were counted during the Second Preliminary Count in 2024. The counting took place centrally in Regina, with 16 teams, each consisting of a DRO and an assistant, working on a single constituency at a time. Each candidate was also entitled to a representative to observe the ballot count for their constituency. When the counting for one constituency was concluded, the election officials moved on to count the ballots of another constituency. At the completion and reconciliation of each constituency, Elections Saskatchewan reported the results on its website and provided results to the media.

Final Count: Per legislation, the Final Count of ballots took place 12 days after the election, on November 9, 2024. Traditionally, hospital, remand, and temporarily displaced (HRT) ballots were received at head office, sorted, and then distributed to returning offices throughout the province for counting. In 2024, however, the Chief Electoral Officer drew on his authority under section 5.2 of the Act to direct that HRT ballots be counted centrally at head office. This change simplified the process, shortened the timelines, and increased security by removing the risk of lost ballots. The Final Count also included the remaining 8,184 mail-in ballots that were postmarked by October 28 and received between October 27 and 11:59 pm November 7. Those ballots were also counted centrally in Regina, in a manner consistent with the Second Preliminary Count.

Findings
Similar to the findings from 2020 and 2016, the ballot counting and reporting procedures were generally observed to have been completed accurately and successfully. The DRO is required to conduct a ballot reconciliation prior to counting the ballots, and the time to do so varies from one counting team to another. Of the nine observations

Almost all respondents (95.9 percent) said they were confident that that their ballot was counted

conducted following the close of voting, the shortest time to reconcile ballots was four minutes and the longest was one hour, with an average time of 32 minutes. The time required for the counting of ballots ranged from 20 minutes to three hours and five minutes, with an average time of one hour and 45 minutes. There was universal (100 percent) compliance on all matters observed, including the following important procedures:

- all counting teams had two members;
- the DRO accounted for all ballots before counting;
- the DRO announced the candidate for all ballots;
- candidate representatives, where present, were shown all ballots;
- candidate representatives, where present, were shown the empty ballot box upon conclusion;
- the ballot paper account was completed; and,
- the DRO balanced the ballot account.

These high levels of compliance with vote counting procedures are aligned with high levels of voter confidence and worker satisfaction. Voters appeared quite satisfied with the time it took to count ballots and report election results, with nine in 10 voters saying they were satisfied with the time required to do so. When voters were asked about their confidence in the election process, almost all respondents (95.9 percent) said they were confident that their ballot was counted. There was also a high (though slightly lower) level of confidence that Elections Saskatchewan ensures that only those eligible to vote can cast a ballot (87.3 percent). The slightly lower level of confidence in the latter suggests that Elections Saskatchewan should make further efforts to inform the voting public of its efforts to ensure election integrity, and the lack of evidence for any systematic fraudulent voting in Saskatchewan elections.

There was also a high level of satisfaction overall among election workers. For example, 82.9 percent of election workers in technology constituencies said they were

satisfied with vote counting, and 90.1 percent in non-technology constituencies said the same. The main challenge with vote counting reported by election workers was that the process followed a very long day of work on the last day of voting. 82.5 percent of election workers in technology constituencies and 76.1 percent in non-technology constituencies said that many election workers were tired by the time they counted votes.

Compared to voters and election workers, members of the Field Leadership Team (especially the Returning Officers and Election Clerks) registered slightly less satisfaction with vote counting, with 72.8 percent in the technology constituencies and 82.5 percent in non-technology constituencies indicating they were satisfied. The principal reason for the lesser satisfaction among FLT members was their perception that they did not receive all the poll results in a timely manner, with 76.6 percent in technology constituencies and 73.8 percent in non-technology constituencies saying they were satisfied they received election results from all voting locations on time.

There are many challenges associated with vote counting. The process is completed by election workers following a long day of administering ballots, and changes in election administration have resulted in a significant increase in the number of ballots in many ballot boxes. This can lead to a longer wait for results: generally speaking, more ballots require more time for counting. For this reason, most jurisdictions pair electronic poll books with vote counting machines that can count ballots in a fraction of the time required for manual counting. Because vote counting machines were not permitted in the 2024 General Election, this problem was addressed through the deployment of the additional count teams described above. Their goal was to keep roughly the same percentage of polls reporting at less than three hours as was the case in 2020. Administrative data shows that in 2020, 65.3 percent of polls reported in less than three hours. In 2024, that number rose to 79.2 percent. While the deployment of count teams presented logistical challenges and necessitated a more complex process, it appears to have significantly improved the timely delivery of results.

445,011

Total votes cast in
2020 Provincial Election

471,087

Total votes cast in
2024 Provincial Election

5

CHAPTER FIVE

Responding to the Assessment

Administrative vs. Legislative Response Requirements

In 2016, the Chief Electoral Officer introduced a plan to modernize Saskatchewan's voting process in his *Report on the 28th General Election*. The plan sought to do several things: provide greater flexibility for voters by broadening access to voting, provide political parties and candidates with more timely information to assist their get-out-the-vote efforts, and reduce staffing requirements at the polls in response to growing difficulties recruiting qualified staff. These changes were to be introduced gradually over several election cycles, eventually aligning Elections Saskatchewan with other election management bodies in Canada and providing the most significant update of election procedures since Saskatchewan became a province in 1905.

The first major efforts to transform the election experience were scheduled for the 2020 Provincial Election. While the global COVID-19 pandemic forced Elections Saskatchewan to delay its plan to introduce technology into some voting places, other important changes were introduced

in the 2020 election. Due to the pandemic, provision of a safe voting environment was imperative, so Elections Saskatchewan encouraged voters to consider voting at an advance poll or voting by mail, instead of simply casting ballots in person on Election Day. By distributing voting across a number of channels, Elections Saskatchewan sought to decrease the number of voters gathered in one place on Election Day. The strategy worked. More people voted in advance polls, and more voted by mail, than in any previous election.[1]

In 2024, Elections Saskatchewan retained many of the changes introduced in 2020 and added a number of others, including important technological innovations. For example, in urban constituencies – over half of the constituencies in Saskatchewan – electronic poll books were introduced in tandem with significant changes in the way in-person voting was organized. Electronic poll books provided capacity to strike off voters from the province-wide voters list in real time, with a portal providing parties and candidates instantaneous access to this information. Electronic poll books enabled Elections Saskatchewan to reduce the

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[1] *A Report on the Twenty-Ninth General Election, Volume I: Statement of Votes* (Regina: Elections Saskatchewan, June 2021). Full reports on all elections from 2007 onward are available on Elections Saskatchewan's website at https://www.elections.sk.ca/reports-data/reports-publications.

number of voting locations, while maintaining service for voters. Voting locations in the rural parts of the province continued to use paper-based voter strike-off, resulting in two quite different processes for administering voting in urban and rural constituencies.

As part of the administrative review reported in this volume, surveys were conducted with electors, the Field Leadership Team, and election workers.[2] Focus groups were held with the Field Leadership Team, young electors, and electors with disabilities. Interviews were conducted with candidates' financial agents and with the Chief Official Agents, and in one case the leader, of several political parties. These rich sources of data confirmed a high level of satisfaction overall with the way the election was administered. However, the information obtained through these sources also provided a broad range of suggestions and advice on how the election process can be improved and modernized. There was widespread support for steps taken in 2024 to expand voting opportunities, and to continue to improve the voting experience through technology upgrades.

The emerging consensus is that voters should not be limited to voting only on a single Election Day and only at their assigned poll. The growing popularity of early voting and Vote by Mail led Elections Saskatchewan to introduce Voting Week, which was more in line with voters' expectations. For many election workers, the requirement to write voters' information in the poll book and physically strike their name on the voters list seemed inefficient and antiquated. So too did the very long hours, with virtually no breaks, required of Election Day workers. The electronic poll books used in urban constituencies proved highly popular: voters indicated satisfaction with the increased flexibility to vote where and when they liked, as well as with the time

> The information obtained through these sources also provided a broad range of suggestions and advice on how the election process can be improved and modernized.

it took to get to the voting place and to vote. Parties and candidates also indicated satisfaction with access to better information on who voted, and election workers were satisfied with more efficient processes. However, the long hours of work, especially on the last day of voting – when they were required to count ballots after an 11-hour day of administering voting – continue to be a point of concern with election workers.

For the purposes of implementation, the many opportunities to enhance election administration identified in this report can be divided into two main categories. The first category consists of challenges with the core voting model, which can be addressed only by revising *The Election Act, 1996* and therefore remain in the hands of the Legislative Assembly. In the coming months, the Chief Electoral Officer will submit a report to the Legislative Assembly recommending amendments that will further broaden access to voting while maintaining or enhancing the integrity of the electoral process. These topics will be the subject of *A Report on the Thirtieth General Election, Volume IV: Chief Electoral Officer's Recommendations for Legislative Reform*.

However, this assessment also provides valuable information on incremental changes and improvements that can be addressed regardless of whether legislative amendments move forward. Elections Saskatchewan is fully committed to implementing this second group of enhancements, provided the necessary resources are made available. Those commitments are summarized below on

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[2] An overview of the sources used for the Administrative Review can be found in Appendix A.

pages 70 to 71, following a report on the steps Elections Saskatchewan has taken to satisfy the parallel set of commitments made after the 29th General Election.

Administrative Commitments Following 2020 General Election and Responses Leading to 2024 General Election

In *A Report on the Twenty-Ninth General Election, Volume II: Administrative Review*, the Chief Electoral Officer made a number of commitments for improvement arising from the assessment of the 2020 General Election. The following table lists those commitments and the efforts made to satisfy each.

There was widespread support for steps taken in 2024 to expand voting opportunities, and to continue to improve the voting experience through technology upgrades.

Voter Registration

Commitment	Response
Continue to explore new sources of reliable external public sector data sources of citizen name and address records for maintaining the voter registry and actively pursue methods of ensuring address updates for registered voters are processed in a regular and timely fashion.	Elections Saskatchewan signed a new data sharing agreement with SGI. It has been used extensively, along with existing data sources, to ensure the register data is current. Elections Saskatchewan also sponsored Voter Registration Month each May to encourage voters to update their register information. It sent over 5,000 birthday cards to new voters to encourage registration, and the registration portal featured prominently on the website.
Expand the use of electronic delivery of Voter Information Cards (VICs) by encouraging voters to register electronically for delivery.	Elections Saskatchewan advertised the use of electronic VICs in virtually all election-related materials. This campaign resulted in more than double the number of voters using electronic VICs in 2024 than in 2020.
Regularly measure the quality of the data contained in the register of voters using the most accurate demographic statistical information available for reference use.	The registry is continuously monitored for quality, and it is updated regularly with data provided by partners.
Examine the feasibility of using technology for accessing an electronic version of the register of electors at polling stations. Strike-off voters electronically in real time.	A feasibility study was conducted by Elections Saskatchewan staff, and electronic pollbooks were piloted in the Meewasin and the Regina Coronation Park-Lumsden Morse-Regina Walsh Acres by-elections. The use of electronic pollbooks was then approved by the Board of Internal Economy for use in the 30th General Election.
Use scanning technology to read barcodes on the VIC for electronic strike-off. Pilot this system in a by-election if possible.	Scanning technology was piloted during the Regina Coronation Park-Lumsden Morse-Regina Walsh Acres byelections. The system was expanded for the 30th General Election through the introduction of barcodes on a newly designed voting record.
Endeavour to improve registration rate for traditionally underserved groups such as First Nations, Métis, and new Canadians.	For the 2024 General Election, Elections Saskatchewan conducted a voter registration pilot on three First Nations: Beardy's, Nekaneet, and Little Black Bear. The results of this pilot will guide registration activities for 2028 and beyond.

Election Workers

Commitment	Response
Innovate in building a community with previous election workers throughout the entire election cycle in order to facilitate future recruitment.	Elections Saskatchewan undertook a reinvigoration of the Take Part community throughout 2023-24. This included extensive engagement with members via a topical and informative email newsletter. Additionally, Take Part was used prior to the election to recruit for simulations and for head office positions.
Expand the range of training materials that are available for delivery online. Pursue further innovation in methods of delivering training online and in person.	For the 2024 General Election, Elections Saskatchewan worked with an Instructional Designer to refine and enhance training methods and materials. All training was revised in accordance with modern adult education principles.
Further enhance the testing program contained in the Take Part app that confirms successful completion of training modules.	As part of the overhaul of all Elections Saskatchewan training as a comprehensive Saskatchewan Election Academy (SEA), the Take Part app was renamed and redesigned as the Saskatchewan Election Academy (SEA) app with expanded testing throughout all training modules to assess worker comprehension of training materials.
Plan for the administration of Vote by Mail to continue to be implemented by head office and develop a training system for election workers for Vote by Mail.	In anticipation of the 2024 General Election, Elections Saskatchewan recruited a Vote by Mail administrator to manage the operations. Training materials were developed and delivered to staff.
Develop further videos that help standardize in-person training of Election Day Workers. Develop a specific module that focuses on the transition from administering voting to ballot counting. Include a ballot counting and reconciliation module in the in-person training.	Elections Saskatchewan created videos for certain generalized aspects of training. For ballot counting and reconciliation, hands-on exercises were developed in line with principles of adult education.
Conduct an assessment of the workload of advance poll workers versus election workers. Consider whether the schedule of fees for these positions should be adjusted	As part of the Schedule of Fees review, Elections Saskatchewan did extensive workload analysis. Additionally, the workload of each election worker position was evaluated and adjusted through testing in byelections and extensive pre-election simulations.
Conduct a focus group of the Field Leadership Team to review advice provided on recruitment, including emphasis on the Take Part Program, the timing for hiring election workers, employing international students, and other recruitment matters.	Elections Saskatchewan conducted a focus group following the 2020 General Election and created feedback opportunities by organizing a series of rotating meetings throughout the province, where a head office team would meet with Returning Officers in person. In this way, communication channels were open throughout the Pre-Writ Period to receive feedback and insights from the field.
Demonstrate progress in ongoing collaboration and sharing of Take Part list with other jurisdictions and public institutions that use the same workforce.	Elections Saskatchewan allows both municipalities and Elections Canada to distribute relevant and timely communications to the Take Part community.

Accessibility for Voters with Disabilities

Commitment	Response
Intensify engagement with disability communities and stakeholders, especially with respect to voter education, improved sensitivity training for poll workers, and research focused on accessibility issues faced by Indigenous voters with disabilities.	In 2023, Elections Saskatchewan invited the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School for Public Policy to partner with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) to conduct consultations with representatives of accessibility groups. These consultations yielded concrete recommendations for actions that would remove barriers for voters with disabilities. An accessibility task force was formed by Elections Saskatchewan to implement a series of measures that would address these recommendations.
Engage with the disability communities on all aspects of the Vote by Mail process. Ensure that applying for a Vote by Mail ballot and voting by mail are accessible to all voters.	During their 2023 consultations, a team composed of members from the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School for Public Policy and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) took prototypes of the Vote by Mail package with them to gather feedback from accessibility groups. As well, Elections Saskatchewan worked with the Center for Civic Design on improvements to the Vote by Mail ballot.
Work toward full accessibility at advance and Election Day polls, offering transparency and clarity for all voters where accessible facilities are unavailable.	Elections Saskatchewan continues towards the goal of full accessibility. However, a few communities lack accessible facilities, so Elections Saskatchewan ensures transparency for voters by providing details explaining the lack of accessibility on the website and on VICs.
Develop and implement a recruitment and training strategy for people with disabilities, for both the Field Leadership Team and for election workers.	For the 2024 General Election, Elections Saskatchewan focused on accessibility for election workers. To this end, a program was piloted in partnership with SaskAbilities to hire a number of their clients as Information Officers for the first time during the 30th General Election. Accessibility videos were also revamped and shown to all workers. In 2028, Elections Saskatchewan will consider strategies for training and recruitment of people with disabilities to the Field Leadership Team.
Study the barriers experienced by voters with intellectual disabilities and develop a meaningful strategy for addressing them.	Elections Saskatchewan conducted its own literature review on barriers and partnered with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems and the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School for Public Policy to study the barriers experienced by voters with intellectual disabilities. On the basis of their recommendations, Elections Saskatchewan uses infographics (delivering information through pictures, not words) and has developed signage for all levels of reading. These items are then provided to accessibility groups for distribution to their members.

First Nations

Commitment	Response
Build relationships with First Nation communities through outreach that focuses on maintaining ongoing, deep and long-term engagement with community leaders and addressing remaining barriers to election participation, such as access to identification documents for First Nations voters and timely delivery of Voter Information Cards to all registered voters living in reserve communities.	Elections Saskatchewan strove to build strong relationships with First Nations throughout the electoral cycle. Some of the measures undertaken include: (1) Tours conducted of reserves in Northern Saskatchewan by the Chief Electoral Officer; (2) Direct correspondence between the First Nations Chiefs and the Chief Electoral Officer; (3) Appointment of Enhanced SDROs from First Nations bands.
Develop and implement a recruitment and training strategy for First Nations people for both the Field Leadership Team and for election workers.	Elections Saskatchewan created the position of Enhanced SDROs to facilitate recruitment. Further, all FLT participated in cultural sensitivity training to ensure that their recruitment and training were conducted appropriately.
Review the languages in which election materials are translated, in conjunction with a selection of First Nations groups, to ensure translation services meet current needs and community expectations.	Elections Saskatchewan intensified its translation strategy by offering Cree and Dene translations of not just the Voters Guide, but also key informational posters used in voting locations.
Build upon Elections Saskatchewan's success in outreach by focusing on barriers experienced by other groups such as First Nations voters not living on reserve and Métis voters.	The Chief Electoral Officer met with Métis Nation provincial and regional leadership to understand their needs and to determine how Elections Saskatchewan might assist. Elections Saskatchewan facilitated Métis Nation's development of capacity to complete their boundaries assessment. Further, the CEO spoke to the Métis Nation Field Leadership Team during training for their most recent election. For First Nations voters not living on reserve, Elections Saskatchewan contacted Friendship Centres throughout the province and provided information packages on registration and voting. These packages were also provided to the Métis Nation to be shared with their members.
Begin to formalize administrative relationships between Elections Saskatchewan and First Nations through Memoranda of Understanding in advance of the General Election.	In advance of the 2024 General Election, Elections Saskatchewan began discussions with 19 First Nations in the province to formalize administrative relationships. These have thus far resulted in the signing of nine Memoranda of Understanding.

Political Parties and Candidates

Commitment	Response
Further develop the option of delivering to political parties and candidates, through an electronic portal, information on who has already voted, for use during advance voting and Election Day voting. Include information in the portal on who has requested an absentee ballot package.	A system providing strike-off data through the portal has been developed for candidates and political parties, made possible by the use of electronic poll books. For non-technology polls, strike-off data was gathered and submitted by Returning Officers through an app that Elections Saskatchewan developed. It was then also supplied through the portal.
Investigate opportunities within current legislation to further streamline administrative requirements related to the completion of nomination papers by candidates, collection of witness signatures, notarization of completed nomination papers, and payment of nominee fees.	Elections Saskatchewan's ability to make administrative changes is limited by the parameters set by legislation. However, since the 29th General Election, Elections Saskatchewan has responded to the feedback from financial agents and Chief Official Agents and added content to increase clarity. Further, the Chief Electoral Officer has made recommendations that the requirement for witnesses to be from the same constituency be removed.

Voter Information

Commitment	Response
Conduct further testing on the portal for voter registration and applying for Vote by Mail. Adopt an approach of continuous improvement to ensure that the experience is as simple and efficient as possible for the voting public.	The VBM portal has been thoroughly tested, and improvements were made in anticipation of the 2024 General Election, including restricting the ability to submit without uploading identification to reduce the likelihood of rejected applications.
Continue to engage with literacy organizations to review the content of all voter information, ensuring it meets the needs of the public.	Elections Saskatchewan created a simplified video to present user-friendly instructions. Elections Saskatchewan implemented the recommendation to use pictures as well as words to make materials easier to understand.
Complete an assessment of the provincial-municipal election overlap issue based on the experience in 2020 and on consultations with municipal election officials and offer a public recommendation on a solution.	In August 2021, the Chief Electoral Officer published an updated version of the discussion paper, *Resolving the Municipal/Provincial Election Timing Problem in Saskatchewan*. That paper provided an analysis of the issue and offered a public recommendation that municipal elections be moved to May 2024 and then continue every four years thereafter.

Advance Voting

Commitment	Response
Where legislatively and operationally viable, adopt electronic pollbooks at advance voting. Strike-off voters electronically and upload the strike-off data on a regular basis for access by head office.	Elections Saskatchewan piloted electronic pollbooks in the Regina Coronation Park and Regina Walsh Acres byelection and used them extensively in the 2024 General Election.
Continue to examine workforce planning associated with the staffing of advance polls to better predict peak demands.	Data on peak demands will only be available following the 2024 General Election from the use of electronic pollbooks. However, poll locations and staffing requirements were determined based upon extensive analysis of data from previous events and GIS mapping.
Adjust the number of ballot boxes (and thus the number of DRO and poll clerk teams) that are assigned to each advance voting place during all of the periods of advance voting.	Elections Saskatchewan conducted extensive testing of a variety of ballot box sizes among other methods to accommodate increased advance voting. The solution adopted was a shift towards Voting Week, along with deployment of additional counting teams to ensure timely reporting of results.
Continue to research and test the most efficient methods available to accurately count the votes contained in advance voting ballot boxes to ensure election night voting results are not delayed.	Elections Saskatchewan redesigned its staffing to include the deployment of additional counting teams. These teams were used to facilitate the timely counting of ballots for the 2024 General Election.

Vote by Mail

Commitment	Response
Registered political parties should be invited to send observers to all administrative aspects of Vote by Mail, including ballot reception, adjudication, and ballot counting.	Registered political parties have been invited to observe all aspects of Vote by Mail through the byelections and the 2024 General Election. Elections Saskatchewan will continue to follow best practice and build transparency by encouraging observers to witness all components of the electoral process.
Design and implement a system for administering the Vote by Mail component of absentee voting from head office, in the expectation that there will be increased voting by mail in future elections and that the system will be administered centrally.	Vote by Mail was adopted by a CEO Directive following the 2020 General Election. The approach has been extensively refined in the interim period and was widely used in the 2024 General Election. Elections Saskatchewan will continue to seek ways to improve access to Vote by Mail for the next election in the province.
Develop methods for voters with disabilities to request a Vote by Mail or absentee ballot with accessibility features designed to accommodate their disability.	Vote by Mail applications have been evaluated by the Center for Civic Design and have been redesigned to optimize ease of use and accessibility. Further, Elections Saskatchewan created a modified paper application suitable for voters with low vision.
Design a ballot tabulation system that is specific to the Vote by Mail ballots that are administered centrally in anticipation of legislative change that would support such a system. Pilot such a system in a byelection, if one is conducted at an appropriate time.	While the Chief Electoral Officer recommended the use of vote counting equipment, that recommendation was not adopted at this time by legislators. To ensure prompt delivery of results, Elections Saskatchewan used a Second Preliminary Count, held two days after the last day of voting, to count Vote by Mail ballots that had been returned by that point. This ensured the number of ballots in the Final Count was manageable.

Ballot Counting and Reporting

Commitment	Response
Adjust advance poll ballot count staffing arrangements and find effective methods to ensure the results of each advance poll are released as early as possible on election night.	For the 2024 General Election, Elections Saskatchewan closely monitored the number of ballots at each voting station and deployed additional counting teams when necessary.
Hire poll supervisors earlier in the campaign period, and increase the amount of training provided to them to ensure they fulfill their leadership role in each polling location. Develop additional training modules specific to poll supervisors.	Elections Saskatchewan investigated adjusting the hiring dates, but the election calendar proved too compressed to adjust. Instead, the training of SDROs was significantly increased to ensure that they received full training for all roles they supervised. Significantly more material was also provided to them through the SEA app.
Review methods, processes, and instructions regarding the telephone reporting of polling station results to the returning office on election night to ensure reporting is as efficient and orderly as possible.	All processes were reviewed and the manual has been updated to clarify the timelines and activities to ensure timely, accurate reporting of results.
Implement additional training modules for election workers to transition from voting administration to counting and reporting.	Hands-on exercises for counting and closing of polls were developed and delivered to voting workers in anticipation of the 2024 General Election. Additionally, kits and materials were updated with a more efficient organization to simplify the transition to the counting/reporting phase.
Engage a focus group of Election Day workers to review and enhance the placemat designed to assist in understanding and implementing the steps involved in ballot counting and reconciliation.	Feedback was solicited from election workers for four separate byelections. The materials related to counting and closing of polls were redesigned.
Continue and refine the practice of centralized counting of Vote by Mail ballots, including, where administratively possible, the practice of second preliminary counting held prior to the Final Count.	A review of all processes regarding centralized counting of Vote by Mail ballots was conducted, and improvements were made throughout. The Second Preliminary Count was also used to ensure prompt reporting of results.

Administrative Commitments Following 2024 General Election

In response to the assessment of the 30th General Election, the Chief Electoral Officer is committed to making the following administrative changes and improvements in the preparation and delivery of the 31st General Election, scheduled for October 2028:

Election Timing

Continue to examine the impact of the proximity of provincial and local election periods and work with municipalities to find consensus on the issue.

Build capacity amongst the Field Leadership Team by prioritizing reappointments where aptitude and competence have been demonstrated.

Establish clear target dates for the adoption of election modernization initiatives, both with respect to any required legislative changes and for development, testing, and roll-out of technology.

Communicating with Voters and Other Stakeholders

Continue to build relationships with media outlets and political parties by providing technical briefings on significant changes and on proposed changes to election administration.

Continue to monitor ever-changing threats to the election environment and prioritize the preparation of and distribution of materials related to Elections Saskatchewan's activities to preserve and promote election integrity.

Work to create plain-language informational materials that serve all voters including those with reading challenges.

Create and implement a communications strategy to position Elections Saskatchewan as the authoritative source of provincial election administration information in advance of the 2028 General Election.

Continue to develop the database on political financing so that it is easy for voters to obtain accurate, timely, and comprehensive information on political contributions and expenditures.

Seniors Voting

Undertake a comprehensive assessment of voting services for senior citizens and produce a strategy for seniors voting in the 2028 Provincial Election that more effectively ensures that the suite of voting options available serves their needs.

Special Voting

Assess all special voting provisions as part of the Administrative Review for the 31st General Election to ensure that they are meeting the needs of voters and broadening access to voting.

Voter Registration

Engage with data-sharing partners, such as Elections Canada, to improve data exchange to ensure register is as current and comprehensive as possible.

Continue to engage with vendors to ensure the voters list, or voting record, uses enhanced content, such as photo ID, that is available at polling locations.

Continue to work to ensure voter register coverage and currency for traditionally underserved communities.

Expand the use of electronic Voter Information Cards through both SMS and email.

Plan for the potential future availability of electronic forms of ID at voting locations and work to develop capacity for scanning of physical identification.

Continue the use of scanning technology and expand where administratively viable.

Voting Locations and Returning Office Space

Complete an assessment of the use of a more limited number of polling locations in the urban constituencies that used technology and adjust planning for the 31st General Election accordingly.

Consider the possibility of multiple returning offices, overseen by a single Returning Officer, using a single location for the returning offices.

In continuing evolution toward Voting Week, work toward making voting more seamless, including ensuring that the same voting locations are used on the last day of voting as were used in the first five days of voting in rural constituencies.

Election Workers

Assess the workload of poll workers (especially the role of Deputy Returning Officer in the absence of a poll clerk) and review the compensation model for each position.

Continue to prioritize adult education principles in refining a mixed-use approach to training (including online, video, and in-person education). Demonstrate further expansion of the approach used in 2024.

Develop an enhanced testing program for all training modules and applications.

Accessibility for Voters with Disabilities

Expand relationship with key organizations that support the disability community in identifying needs and partnering to find innovative solutions.

Highlight the use of initiatives like expanded opportunities for voting by mail and special balloting (such as homebound voting) as options available for some members of the disability community.

Develop and implement a recruitment and training strategy for people with disabilities.

First Nations and Métis Voters

Review the experiences with the broader engagement with First Nations communities from the 2024 election and build upon successes.

Use memoranda of understanding as a way of developing and formalizing partnership opportunities with leaders in First Nations communities.

Develop and implement a recruitment and training strategy for First Nations electors.

Examine the effectiveness of the Supervisory Returning Officer for First Nations position used in 2024 and build upon its successes.

Apply lessons from greater engagement of First Nations communities to an engagement strategy for First Nations voters not living on reserve.

Continue engagement with Métis electors and produce voter information material in the Michif language.

Consider mobile early polls for First Nation communities that may require less than a full five days of early voting.

Ensure contact with First Nations band offices in the year prior to an election to enquire about placing a polling station on reserves. Focus on those First Nations that did not have polls in the 2024 Provincial Election.

Political Parties and Candidates

Consult with registered political parties that do not currently access data to determine what steps can be taken to better facilitate access.

Early Voting

Expand on foundations laid for Voting Week during the 2024 General Election and create a more fully integrated Voting Week.

Expand the use of technology for electronic strike-off.

Continue to develop a database of locations that are available for early voting and meet all accessibility standards. Reach out to other election management bodies to establish shared program for distributing this information.

Vote by Mail

Ensure that registered political parties are invited to observe all administrative aspects of voting by mail.

Develop methods whereby voters with disabilities can request and obtain a package to vote by mail that meets their disability needs.

Last Day of Voting

Remove any administrative obstacles to the continued implementation of Voting Week polls.

Ballot Counting and Reporting

Explore innovative approaches to provide "just in time" refresher to training on poll closing and ballot counting activities without increasing the overall time for training.

Review system for deployment of count teams and ensure that it is designed to optimize the efficiency while maximizing the integrity of the count.

Continue to conduct research on and test the use, effectiveness, and accuracy of ballot counting technology within legislative parameters.

Encourage parties and candidates to deploy candidate representatives to observe vote counting procedures at all polling places.

Description of Assessment Methods[1]

Election Assessment Planning

In January 2023, the Chief Electoral Officer recruited a senior election administrator from an outside jurisdiction and a leading academic authority from within the province to join him in developing a project plan for the independent assessment of the administration of Saskatchewan's 30th General Election. The Chief Electoral Officer had initiated similar assessments of Saskatchewan's 28th and 29th General Elections that provided benchmark data on election administration. The current assessment was intended at the outset to be a continuation and extension of the previous assessments. Although each of the assessments is designed as much as possible to provide comparable data on electoral and administrative practices, it is inevitable that adjustments are necessary to accommodate changes implemented during each election. For example, the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic led to the need to adjust several administrative practices while also requiring corresponding adjustments in the measures and methods used in the assessment in 2020. Similarly, changes introduced as part of the electoral modernization project in 2024 require additional adjustments to this assessment.

The starting point for assessing the 2024 election was the range of tools used in 2016: pre-election consultations with key stakeholder groups, and post-election surveys of voters and non-voters, members of the Field Leadership Team, and election workers. Additionally, as 2016 was the first time such a robust assessment had been conducted in the province, outside expertise was harnessed through the use of peer assessment. To that end, 12 seasoned election officials were drawn from election agencies across the country to act as observers in polls in and around Regina. With the success of the 2016 observer program and the lessons learned from conducting such a program, the observations at polling places in 2020 could be conducted by graduate students in the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of public policy under the direction and supervision of the assessment team. These were held on the last day of Advance Voting and on Election Day in and around Saskatoon. Finally, a survey of candidates for office and interviews with a selection of financial agents and with the parties' Chief Official Agents rounded out the research. This range of assessment tools applied social science research principles of combining survey research with direct observations and interviews with informed participants.

To ensure that the data gathered from survey research was consistent with rigorous social scientific standards, the core external assessment team developed the survey instruments with the support of the University of Saskatchewan's Canadian Hub for Applied Social Research (CHASR). All of the research instruments were developed and administered under the direction of the administrative review assessment team.

Pre-Election Consultations

Elections Saskatchewan partnered with the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School for Public Policy (JSGS) and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) to conduct consultations with key stakeholders for the 2024 General Election on their experiences with the election system and to identify barriers to participation. On June 18-22, 2023, the team composed of Dr. Jim Farney (JSGS), Neil Kewistep (JSGS), Rebecca Aaberg (IFES), and Kyle Lemargie (IFES) came to Saskatoon to conduct visits with accessibility groups. They also conducted a series of consultations with First Nations Chiefs and Band Officials in the area surrounding Saskatoon. The team then returned on November 11-13 to conduct follow-up consultations for the purpose of providing assessment data for the administrative review.

From May to September in 2024, online interviews were conducted with 400 eligible voters in Saskatchewan each month, for a total sample size of 2,000 eligible voters. The survey questionnaire was developed by the assessment team and the data were gathered by the Canadian Hub for Applied Social Research at the University of Saskatchewan. The surveys included questions such as voters' awareness of the scheduled election, awareness of Elections Saskatchewan's communications about the election, incidence of name or address changes since the 2020 election, knowledge of the respondents' voter registration status, knowledge and expectations of the voting procedure that the respondent intended to use in 2024, and attitudes about the components of a well-run election.

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[1] It should be noted that the administrative review published in this volume does not include any data gathered during the political finance portion of election administration. That data, along with discussion of methodology, will be included in Volume III of this Report, *Statement of Expenditures*.

Observational Data

The overall purpose of the observation program was to gain insight into the degree to which the procedures and protocols developed by Elections Saskatchewan for the administration of the election were followed by the temporary field staff members during Voting Week. As was the case in 2020, this observer program engaged 12 observers, assigning each to one constituency on the fifth day of voting (October 26) and on the last day of voting (October 28), to conduct observations based on specific checklists. Whereas the observations were conducted on constituencies in and around Saskatoon in 2020, in 2024 they were conducted on 12 constituencies in and around Regina, six within the city of Regina and the other six in nearby rural constituencies. The constituencies within the city of Regina were designated as "technology" constituencies, in which laptop computers were used for voter strike-off during all six days of voting, and the constituencies outside Regina were designated as "non-technology" constituencies, in which election workers used paper-based processes in voting places. A debriefing session was held in Regina on October 29. Some of the observations focused on elements of the voting place itself, such as compliance with accessibility guidelines or guidelines for navigational signage. Some of the observations focused on specific activities at certain times of the day, such as poll opening and closing. And some observations focused on the interaction between voters and election workers.

There are two principal differences between the observers program over the three elections in 2016, 2020, and 2024. First, location: during the 28th General Election in 2016, the observers focused on 12 constituencies in and around Regina and Swift Current; during the 29th General Election in 2020 they focused on Saskatoon and the surrounding communities; and in 2024 they focused on Regina and surrounding communities. In all three elections, however, six urban constituencies and six rural constituencies were included. The second principal difference is the identity of the observers. In 2016, the observers were drawn from the full-time staff of federal, provincial, and municipal election

agencies. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic precluded drawing on staff from across the country. Instead, a partnership was formed with the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Saskatchewan to recruit 12 students: nine currently enrolled in JSGS, two Political Science students, and one law student. In 2024, Elections Saskatchewan continued the partnership with the Johnson Shoyama school, recruiting 12 students from the program at the University of Regina to participate as observers. We are grateful to the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy for their support of this project.

In 2024, the observer plan resulted in observations at 56 polling places (27 on Day 5 of voting and 29 on Day 6) and data gathered on 1,667 interactions between voters and election officials (743 on Day 5 of voting and 924 on Day 6). For comparison, observations in the 2020 election occurred at 96 polling places (33 during advance voting and 63 on Election Day), and data gathered on 1,502 interactions between voters and election officials.

In addition to observations at polling places, one of the senior members of the assessment team conducted observations of the processing of Vote by Mail absentee ballots at Elections Saskatchewan's head office in the period immediately preceding the last day of voting. In addition, direct observation of the counting of Vote by Mail ballots was conducted during the Second Preliminary Count on October 30.

From May to September in 2024, online interviews were conducted with 400 eligible voters in Saskatchewan each month, for a total sample size of 2,000 eligible voters.

Post-Election Surveys of Key Stakeholders

The Canadian Hub for Applied Social Research (CHASR), a component of the University of Saskatchewan, was contracted to administer independent surveys and the key stakeholder focus groups, with a focus on their perceptions of how the election was administered and their attitudes toward and views of Elections Saskatchewan. Surveys, focus groups, and interviews were conducted with the following groups:

Voters and Non-Voters: Immediately following the election on October 28, 2024, CHASR conducted an online survey of voters and non-voters in Saskatchewan to assess various aspects of their voting experience. The goal was to complete surveys with 2,400 eligible voters using panels of respondents provided by Voxco. In the end, completed surveys were conducted with 2,105 respondents, and the sample was weighted by age and gender to improve its representativeness. This produced a weighted sample of 2,085, of whom 1,716 said they voted and 366 said they did not vote. Since this sampling technique is a non-probability sample, it is not possible to compute a margin of error for the sample. However, a sample of 2,000 in a population the size of Saskatchewan would produce a margin of error of +/- 2.1% (19 times out of 20). Questions included interest in and knowledge of the election; assessment of Elections Saskatchewan's communications with voters; satisfaction with the voter registration process, the method of voting used, and the voting experience; time spent and distance travelled to vote; perceptions of electoral integrity; attitudes towards voting modernization; and, where applicable, reasons for not voting.

> One focus group was conducted with community members who reported having a disability and representatives of a variety of groups dedicated to advancing the interests of those with visual, hearing, mobility, and other challenges.

Field Research Team Survey: The Field Leadership Team (FLT) survey was an online survey administered to all Supervisory Returning Officers, Returning Officers, and Election Clerks. Since different administrative processes were used for processing voters at technology and non-technology constituencies, slightly different questionnaires were used in the different types of constituencies. A total of 74 members of the FLT received questionnaires for the technology constituencies, and 58 received them for the non-technology constituencies. Of the 74 FLT members from technology constituencies who received the questionnaire, 60 (81.1%) completed the survey, compared to 42 of 58 from non-technology constituencies (72.4%). This compares to a rate of 84% who completed the FLT survey in 2020. The survey launched on November 12, 2024, and closed on November 30, 2024. The survey included assessment of hiring and training; satisfaction with materials, supplies, and supports from head office; satisfaction with the recruitment, training, and deployment of election workers; and satisfaction with administrative procedures in their constituency, including voter processing and vote counting.

Election Week Workers Survey: The Election Week Workers (EWWs) survey was an online survey administered to all those who worked at early polls (October 22-26) or on the last day of voting (October 28). As was the case with the FLT survey, different administrative procedures were used in the technology and non-technology constituencies; therefore, slightly different survey instruments were administered to the two groups. Surveys were sent to 1,200 election week workers in the technology constituencies, of whom 637 completed the survey, for a response rate of 53.1%. In the non-technology constituencies, surveys were sent to 2,152 election week workers, of whom 1,061 completed the survey, for a response rate of 49.2%. The response rates are very similar to the response rate of 49% among election workers in the 2020 election. The survey launched on October 30, 2024, and closed on November 14, 2024. The survey included assessment of hiring and training, assessments of voter registration and voting procedures, assessments of interactions with the returning office, assessments of voter accessibility in the polling place, and vote counting and reporting procedures.

Field Leadership Team Focus Group: A focus group was conducted with 13 participants. Of these, six worked in a technology constituency, five worked in a non-technology
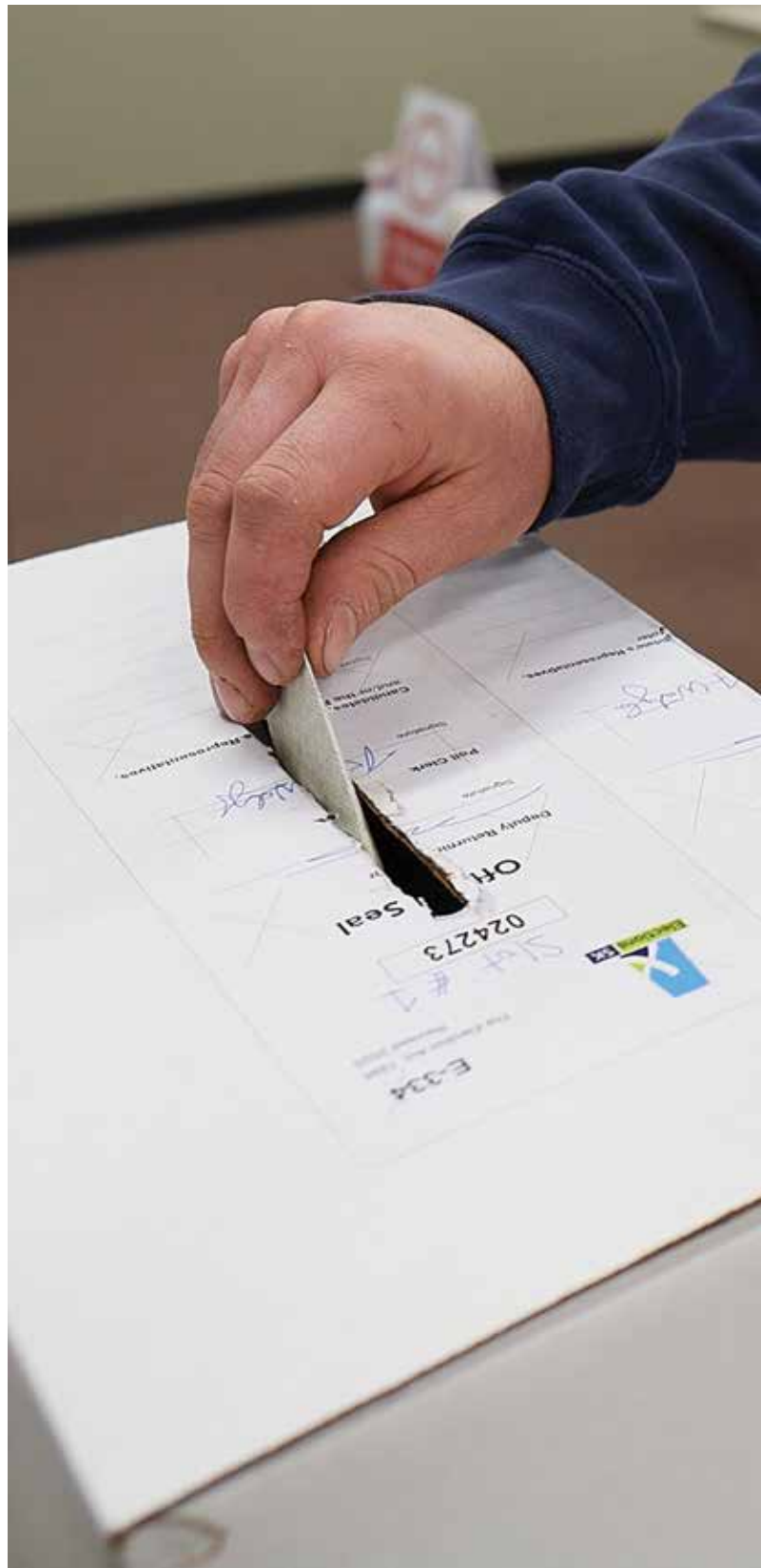
> A focus group was conducted in late November with electors aged 18 to 24 years.

constituency, one did not say which type of constituency they worked in, and one said they worked in both. The focus group took place in early December, and respondents were drawn from the online survey of FLT members. Participants were asked questions related to roles and responsibilities, recruitment and training, voting procedures, the use of technology, vote counting, accessibility, First Nations, voting modernization, the Saskatchewan Election Management System, and their training experience.

Accessibility Community Focus Group: One focus group was conducted with community members who reported having a disability and representatives of a variety of groups dedicated to advancing the interests of those with visual, hearing, mobility, and other challenges. Nine participants took part in the session in early December. Participants discussed issues that included their views about the provincial election, information about the election, voter registration, access to voting, outreach from Elections Saskatchewan, the provincial election and their disability community, and the use of technology.

Youth Focus Group: A focus group was conducted in late November with electors aged 18 to 24 years. When the focus group was scheduled, six young electors agreed to participate. However, when the focus group session took place, only two of the young electors attended, resulting in a very small group. Participants were asked questions relating to their views about provincial elections, information about the election, voter registration, outreach by Elections Saskatchewan, provincial elections and youth organizations, and their voting experience.

Interviews with party officials: Interviews were conducted with four senior leaders among the political parties in Saskatchewan, including the Chief Official Agents from the Green Party, the NDP, the Progressive Conservative Party, and the Saskatchewan Party. Also interviewed was the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

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Elections SK